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**PRECARITY AND PRECARIOUSNESS – A STUDY INTO THE IMPACT OF LOW-  
PAY, LOW-SKILL EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURES ON THE EXPERIENCES OF  
WORKERS IN THE SOUTH WEST OF BRITAIN**

by

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## ABSTRACT

### 'PRECARITY AND PRECARIOUSNESS – A STUDY INTO THE IMPACT OF LOW-PAY, LOW-SKILL EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURES ON THE EXPERIENCES OF WORKERS IN THE SOUTH WEST OF BRITAIN

Constantine Nicolov Manolchev

This is a study into the impact of precarious work, defined as low-skill and low-pay jobs, on workers in the South West of Britain. In it, I investigate the experiences of three broad groups of precarious workers: migrants, care assistants (adult and nursery) and employees working for 'Cleanwell', an international provider of cleaning and catering services.

My approach identifies and occupies the central ground between two opposing perspectives. Along with Guy Standing (2014; 2011), I acknowledge the existence of employment structures which can be objectively described as lacking the security of meaningful pay, tenure, access to training and progression. However, I reject the reductive structural determinism, from structures of work towards working experiences, which he implies. With Kevin Doogan (2015; 2013), I recognise the opposing, 'rising security' argument which cautions against homogenous classifications of precarious workers. Nevertheless, I view it as incomplete, challenging only the extent of precarity conditions but not the inherently negative experiences associated with them.

In my investigation, I distinguish between 'precarity', as the terms and conditions of low-pay and low-skill work and 'precariousness', conceptualised as the corresponding worker experiences. Grounding my study in a phenomenological paradigm of enquiry and adopting a 'meaning condensation' method of analysis (Kvale, 1996), I seek to understand whether workers can re-construct the negative impact of precarious

contexts. As a result, I present precariousness as essentially relational and not absolute. Furthermore, the re-construction of the precarious experience draws on the support of social groups and can lead to fulfilling professional identities. Lastly, precariousness can be a pedagogic experience, both positive and developmental, through which workers can follow the example set by parents and grandparents, as well as serving as role-models themselves.

In the study, I challenge assumptions that precarious work has a predominantly negative impact on workers, yet caution against arguments for worker collectivisation and resistance. I argue that precariousness is a phenomenon neither fully determined by low-skill, low-pay contexts, nor simply a psychological state manifested in isolation from precarious work. Rather, it is the phenomenological 'intending' (Sokolowski, 2000) of precarious structures, that is, the conscious engagement of precarious workers with low-pay and low-skill work through a range of attitudes, beliefs, views and opinions. Defining it in such a way is a departure from conventional approaches and through it, I show that precariousness offers a wider range of, both positive and negative experiences. It is a means through which even the employment context of precarious work can be re-constructed by individual workers who do not have allegiance to a precariat class, whether actual, or 'in-the-making' (Standing, 2011).

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In conclusion, I was once told that PhD theses were like songs. The best ones are already written, the best chords have already been used, and the best solos have already been played. That being the case, we can't re-write them but, if we are lucky, we may be able to add a little of our own interpretation when we cover them. Being very aware that I am using familiar chords, I only hope to have played them well.



## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION AND WORDCOUNT

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. J. ...', written over a horizontal line.

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## CHAPTER 1: THESIS INTRODUCTION AND STRUCTURE

Not as a ladder from earth to Heaven, not as a witness to any creed,  
But simple service simply given to his own kind in their common need.  
-Kipling, *The Sons of Martha*, 27-28

Just like the Rudyard Kipling poem from which I quote above, this thesis is about a group of people who are perceived to be at a social and economic disadvantage. The poem is based on the Biblical story of Christ's visit to the home of Mary and Martha where, rather than being attentive to the Lord, Martha is busy doing work about the house. Kipling approaches the event from a different perspective and crafts the poem as a celebration of those engaged in unremarkable, mundane, ordinary and unnoticeable work which, regardless of whether appreciated or not, provides a necessary service to others. The proposed existence of an insecure and alienated precariat, confined to structures of low-pay and low-skill work (Standing, 2014; 2011) suggests that the precarious workers in it are Sons of Martha, too.

The precariat argument is a major contribution by Guy Standing to current debates on precarity which, although contested, has brought the issue of precarious work back to the forefront of researchers' attention. Standing's books *The Precariat: The New Dangerous class* (2011) and the subsequent *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens* (2014) have explicitly connected the context of precarious work with a range of negative worker experiences. In doing so, Standing's model builds on Bourdieu's (1997) famous statement that 'la précarité est adjourd'hui partout' (precarity is everywhere today) and provides the starting point for my own research into the meaning of precarious work.

The purpose of my study is to, also, examine issues relating to the precarious experience, yet I provide an early caveat of the much broader definition of 'precarity' and its range of meanings. Since its historical conceptualisation pre-date both Standing and Bourdieu, 'precarity' appears as a much more ambiguous term, than I originally anticipated. For example, 'precarity' is applied to the context of chronic poverty in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Britain. 'Precarity' is a term applied by Marx (1986) to describe the 19<sup>th</sup> century labour market context. Polanyi (2001) uses it in reference to the state of 'flux' accompanying movement from neo-liberal to state-regulated markets in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Marxist theorist Mészáros (1986) deals with the dangers of individualisation as a condition which allows the commodification of workers in capitalist societies. Since Beck (2000) conceptualises 'modernity' as just such a context of individualisation and risk, marked by the break-down of traditional social and employment structures, 'precarity' could apply here, too. The conceptual and historical breadth of these precarity manifestations, lead me to conclude that the study of 'precarity' is problematic. This is not only because the sheer range of its meanings makes it ambiguous and vague, but also because there is no clear consensus on whether the modern British labour market context is one of rising or decreasing precarity. I return to this debate in Chapter 2.

Consequently, in this study I propose a new conceptualisation, which breaks current framings of precarity into two component parts, precarity as a *context* and precarity as an *experience*. I reserve the term 'precarity' for the working context, and apply a new term, 'precariousness', to the *experiences* of this working context. Apart from offering greater analytical focus for my study, this conceptualisation reflects the key issue with which this thesis is occupied. Namely, the question of whether the experience of precarious work is really a one-way process forced upon workers, without scope for

individual agency; or whether workers retain the ability to re-construct the experience of precarious work, albeit within precarious contexts.

In my intention of achieving a qualitatively-rich description of precariousness, I seek to go beyond direct experiences and construct its meaning by using the full range of phenomenological 'intentionality', that is, worker attitudes, impressions, perceptions, hopes and expectations (Sokolowski, 2000). To augment my approach, and in line with the phenomenological stance of this inquiry which I return to below, I propose that any phenomenon, precarious work included, can manifest itself to an observer in a variety of 'modes' (Sokolowski, 2000:8). In the instance of this study, those include direct experiences, past and present, but also observations, fear, expectations and any of the other, indirect means through which a worker can become consciously aware (Moran, 2002) of the precarious work phenomenon. Throughout the thesis, this conscious awareness of a phenomenon by an observer is described through the concept of phenomenological 'intentionality'. In turn, by 'intending' a phenomenon the observer or, in the instance of this study, the worker experiencing precarity forms a 'conscious relationship' with it (Sokolowski, 2000:12). This perspective presents workers as conscious beings; able to subjectively 'sense-make' (Fiss and Hirsch, 2005; Weick, 1995) and re-construct their experiences, rather than simply suffer subjugation in precarity contexts. For the purpose of conceptual clarity, it is important to state that in this thesis I apply 'intending' in line with Sokolowski's (2000) use, whereby, 'intending' is the conscious awareness of an experience, emotion, attitude. As such, in my use it differs from 'sense-making', which I use to denote a retrospective engagement with a phenomenon, in line with the definition offered in Weick (1995). In adopting such a phenomenological approach, I place workers at the centre of my enquiry and seek to

return 'zu den Sachen Selbst' (to the matters themselves) (Husserl, 1969) through their narratives.

Having set-out the context of this study and outlined the paradigm from which the inquiry is carried-out, the chapter now introduces existing framings of 'precarity' to demonstrate the inherent ambiguity of the term. Next, the chapter discusses the development of the research questions to address gaps in the literature and, then, presents an overview of the sector, participant profile and research method. Finally, it introduces the thesis structure through an outline of the remaining chapters in the thesis.

### *Precarity – Overview of the Concept*

Barbier (2004) describes 'precarity' as the English transliteration, or anglicisation of the French *précarité* and traces its origin to the Latin *precor*, meaning 'to pray'. In this sense 'precarity' is something of an etymological misnomer and, indeed, in the English edition of the Bourdieu speech quoted in the opening paragraph, *précarité* is translated as 'job insecurity' (Bourdieu, 1998:82). The Oxford English Dictionary extends this meaning by applying the term to contexts, which are 'risky', 'uncertain' and generally outside the control of the person within them (Gilliver, 2013). This can help explain the *precor* root since, faced with uncertainty and having no control over which way an event developed, a person could do little else, but pray for a successful outcome. Moving beyond etymological framing and towards socio-economical application, *précarité* could be linked to concepts of 'risk' and uncertainty in the social commentary of Bourdieu (1998), and the 'modernity' discourses of Bauman (2006; 2000) Beck, (2004; 2000), and Young (2007). Precarity could be discussed through recourse to ideology, such as the worker subordination, commodification and social alienation presented in Marxist perspectives. In his specific application of the term, Marx alternates between the context of working conditions (Marx, 1986:251) and the increasing 'precarisation' of workers' lives as a

result of those conditions such as, for example, wage-level fluctuation and lack of employment certainty (Marx and Engels, 1992:19).

One way of distilling a manageable definition from existing frameworks and manifestations of precarity is to apply it solely to the terms and conditions of precarious work. Low-paid jobs could be an example of such precarious work and, consequently, the study could have appropriated Mason's (2008:15 in Shildrick, MacDonald, Webster and Garthwaite, 2012:16) formula of work, which is "below two thirds of the median hourly wage for all employees". Jobs in the health and hospitality industry, for instance care-work, would be particularly representative of precarious work thus defined, while younger and older, part-time and female workers would also be significantly affected. O'Connor (2015), Jacobs (2014) and Sissons (2011) propose that changes in the British labour market have led to a 'hollowing-out' of the middle, shrinking of middle-level wages and a move towards an 'hourglass' shape, dominated by 'good' and 'bad' jobs. While failing to observe such polarisation in wages, Holmes and Mayhew (2012), along with Lloyd, et al. (2008) also comment on the 'hourglass' shape of the market, and argue that the increase in lower-paid work and disappearance of routine occupations can be harmful for some workers. Precarious work is, thus, placed in the bottom of the labour market 'hourglass' and comprises of 'bad', 'lousy' and low-paid jobs (Manning, 2013; Goos and Manning, 2007). In turn, those are contrasted, against the well-paid, long-term, and fulfilling 'lovely' jobs in the top half of the 'hourglass' (Shildrick et al., 2012:17-36). Support for this framing could be found in Kalleberg's (2013) review of US labour market trends over the 1970-2000 period, resulting in him describing 'good jobs' as those which are suitably remunerated, offer a range of work-benefits and progression; and 'bad jobs' as those, which do not. Against this context Kalleberg (2009:2) defines

precarious work as “employment that is uncertain, unpredictable, and risky, from the point of view of the worker”.

Applications of ‘precarity’, in other words, could be narrowed to the context of work, and specifically to wage distribution, job-availability, tenure and employment levels. This approach, however, requires an assessment of overarching market trends and here, the consensus is lacking. Heery and Salmon (2000:5) comment on the rise of the ‘insecure workforce’ prevented from developing niche skills, open to employer exploitation, and placed in a position of increased inequality. Doogan (2013) and Fevre (2007:530) challenge this ‘insecurity thesis’ as being a ‘social-theoretic enterprise’ based on insufficient evidence. Doogan (2015), furthermore, offers counter-evidence of rising tenure across both full-time and part-time roles in the EU, while in their review of WERS 2011 data van Wanrooy, et al. (2013) comment on the greater percentage of UK employees likely to indicate they feel secure at work, than those who do not. In seeming anticipation of those arguments Heery and Salmon (2000) point out that there continues to be an increased risk of unemployment, both for men and women, which is coupled with a decline in full-time employment. Fevre (2007:529) responds to this challenge by emphasising that part-time workers are more likely to be satisfied with their hours of work. Heery and Salmon (2000:14-15) insist that perceptions of insecurity, nevertheless, correspond to the increase of fixed-term (that is, non-permanent) roles even among higher-paid positions.

Therefore, the uncritical adoption of the ‘precarity’ term in the study of working contexts is problematic not only on account of the above debates, but also because of inherent assumptions that a precarious context can structurally-determine negative working experiences. Consequently, such uses do not so much construct the meaning of precarious work as a wide range of subjective experiences, as assume that precarity

causes 'insecurity', albeit in varying degrees. Therefore, conventional applications tend to abbreviate the precariousness phenomenon, by limiting it to the incidence of negative experiences alone.

Such an approach is based on the assumption that precarious experiences will inevitably result in worker 'insecurity' (Standing, 2011). Insecurity, however, is not simply the absence of security but is itself a complex construct, defined by Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) and DeCuyper, et al. (2014) as worker perceptions of 'powerlessness' in preserving the *status quo* of their current working experience against the threat of job loss. De Witte (2003) further discusses 'objective' aspects of 'job insecurity' as referring to the likelihood of job loss on account of factors external to the individual, for instance, a temporary contract of work, employer closure, and so on. Job insecurity also has a 'subjective' aspect, which, in turn, underscores the possibility of variation in individual perception of the same employment context (DeWitte and Naswall, 2003; Sverke and Hellgren, 2002). For DeWitte (2003) and Hellgren, et al. (1999) this 'subjective' insecurity can, further, be manifested as 'qualitative' insecurity and refer to the loss of job aspects important to individual workers, for example, level of pay, perks, or job content. This is contrasted to 'quantitative' subjective insecurity as the likelihood of job loss altogether and, thus, overlaps with the earlier description of 'objective' insecurity. It is worth recalling that Fevre, et al. (2012; 2011) find that 'negative' workplace experiences ('ill-treatment') do not have to be context-specific and can range from insecurity to wider employer failures in safeguarding the welfare of workers, exposure to work-related pressures, to verbal and even physical abuse.

Is this well-developed conceptualisation of 'insecurity' in the psychology and sociology literatures sufficient to remove the need for 'precariousness' as a construct? Does it not follow that when I discuss 'precariousness', I actually mean 'insecurity'? There are



several justifications for retaining the use of 'precariousness' as a term related to, but differentiated from existing concepts.

First, precariousness encompasses a wider range of meanings than job insecurity, and allows for positive (for instance, fulfilment and job-satisfaction), as well as negative (for instance, insecurity) experiences of precarity contexts. In Standing (2014; 2011) the experience of precarious work is presented as a general sense of 'insecurity', with positive aspects of precariousness hinted at, but undeveloped. Nevertheless, there is an acknowledgement that there can be both 'winners' and 'losers' among precarious workers. Since the 'precariat' (Standing, 2011) share a subordinate position with regards to work, training, representation and so on, the difference in experiences must be caused by subjective re-construction of the same context.

Second, job insecurity can refer to a potential, future development which is caused either by an objective likelihood (a temporary contract coming to an end), or a subjective fear of job-loss, or job-characteristics loss. In this sense, it is the present experience of a future state, whereas precariousness is the present experience of what can be a past, present or a future state, since phenomenological 'intending', as the conscious worker engagement with precarious work through attitudes, opinions, views and beliefs (see, for example, Sokolowski, 2000:8) can encompass all those and bring them to the present relationship between worker and precarious work.

Third, the incidence of insecurity as a subjective fear despite the actual security of present working contexts suggests that insecurity is capable of manifesting itself as a psychological state in isolation from the actual current context. Precarious experiences, however, always occur within the specific context of precarity. A precarious worker who

leaves his or her low-skill, low-pay job and obtains a permanent contract with good level of pay, therefore, can experience insecurity but not precariousness.

Lastly, job insecurity is an individualised experience. It is the cognitive assessment of likely job loss or affective fear of job-loss of the individual worker. Current framings of precarity, however, discuss the scope for collective experiences of precarious workers uniting those sharing it, into a 'rising class' (Standing, 2011:171).

Consequently, in developing my study's aim of understanding the meaning of precarious work through the experiences of precarious workers in the South West, I pose the following two questions:

Research Question 1: Can workers re-construct the (negative) impact which precarious contexts exert on their work-related experiences?

Research Question 2: If workers can re-construct their (negative) precarious experiences away from the determinism of precarity contexts, what are the factors which enable workers to achieve this re-construction?

With these questions in mind, I sought to identify a group of workers particularly likely to find themselves in conditions of precarious work, so as to investigate their range of precarious experiences. Standing's (2011) precariat framing pointed to just such a group of workers.

#### *From Precarious Workers to a Precariat*

Consequently, my investigation of precarious work as a collective experience began with Guy Standing's (2011) *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. Standing (2011; 2012) explicitly connects the context of precarious work with a range of insecurities shared by all members, albeit in varying degrees. Standing's approach may seem like

a revision of Marx's 'proletariat' construct, brought in line with the modern context of flexible work. If viewed simply as a revision, or re-reading of the proletariat framing, therefore, Standing's (2011) model is neither unique, nor entirely novel.

Foti (2005 in Waite, 2009:424) offers a concise summary of how the proletariat fares in the modern context of work, by proposing that "the precariat is to postindustrialism [sic], as the proletariat was to industrialism", thus suggesting that while the context may have changed, the position of subordination has remained. Antunes (2013), also presents a re-packaging of the proletariat in his 'class-that-lives-from-labour' framing which, although published in English in 2013, first appeared in Portuguese in 1999 and preceded Standing's (2011) publication. Antunes' (2013) revision of Marx's focuses on labour market changes resulting from border opening and merging of geographical boundaries through the permeation and use of information and communication technologies (ICT) (see also Kalleberg, 2009:5). The negative experience of labour is, thus, no-longer determined by a proletariat-like position of subordination in capitalist societies. Rather, it is caused by the expansion of work to become the sole productive activity in a person's life, replacing or even taking-away the available time for other forms of socialisation. This argument is also used by Standing (2011) who regards refers to it as 'tertiarisation' and sees it as one of the causes for the negative experiences of the precariat.

Standing's (2011; 2014) approach, however, offers further utility in its ability to take ideological discourses and apply them to a specific group of workers, proposing a causal relationship between the socio-economic context and the experience of precarious work. The conceptualisation of the precariat is, thus, a focused application of Marxist theory to the modern context of unqualified/low-qualified and low-wage work, in order to infer the negative experiences of those low-skill and low-pay workers. Standing (2011)

offers a comprehensive account of the precariat, as workers united in their shared experience of insecurity and not just the job insecurity of short-tenure contracts, but insecurity with regards to levels of pay, access to representation, training, scope for progression, and so on. The precariat collectively hold the position of denizens vis-à-vis work and the State but, unlike Marx' proletariat do not yet possess collective, class-consciousness. Entry to the precariat is potentially open to all but, women, migrants and those engaged in low-pay and low-skill work are likely to be over-represented. Standing (2014a; 2014b; 2013), further, classifies the precariat into three broad groups. Those are the 'nostalgics', a group made-up of socially and politically disengaged migrants, the 'atavists', consisting of former working class members who have lapsed into low-pay, low-skill work and the 'progressives' who are well-educated graduates unable to find secure and well-paid work. The precariat are likely to consist of both 'grinners' and 'groaners', respectively content and unhappy with their precarious jobs, who are likely to experience overarching insecurity, albeit it lesser or greater degree. Since they also lack access to a professional identity on account of their low-pay and low-skill jobs, membership in the precariat is also likely to be associated with stigma, "anger, anxiety, anomie and alienation" (Standing, 2011:19; 35).

This line of argument can be linked to discourses on the existence of a 'culture of worklessness'; that is, the incidence of generations of people, sometimes in the same household, who have never worked (Walker, 2014; MacDonald, et al., 2014). Although researchers such as Shildrick, et al. (2012) generally dismiss such a culture as myth, notions of its existence have influenced the perceptions of policy-makers with Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne going as far as to state that the 'benefits culture' is a "lifestyle choice [which] is going to come to an end" (Wintour, 2010). Such portrayal of groups of workers, thus, seems to support Standing's (2011) suggestion

that we are witnessing the rise of a precariat. Whether relying on benefits or not, it is becoming alienated and stigmatised (see also Goffman, 1990) through its exposure to precarious work, overlooked by State policy, and in danger of drifting into the sub-strata of criminal underclasses.

By his own acknowledgement, Standing's (2012) approach offers only a starting point, aimed to invite subsequent theoretical development and discussion, which he sees as much needed, given the scale of the precarious work condition. In Standing (2011), the precariat is the 'new dangerous class' exactly because the context of precarity stretches beyond employment and towards private and social spheres. As Antunes (2013), Bourdieu (1998) and Lim (1996) observe, negative workplace experiences spill over and could destabilise the private lives of workers, as well. Accordingly, whether viewed as predominantly negative or not, precariat experiences become a matter of wider, social significance. Events such as the MayDay parade for social and employment rights, Tahrir Square, Egypt demonstrations against, among other issues, unemployment and low-wages in 2011, as well as Portuguese 'Precarios Inflexivos' (inflexible precarious workers) marches in 2011 (Antunes, 2013) appear to further suggest that the 'precariat is stirring' (Standing, 2011:1). Such arguments seem to resurrect the 'new spectre haunting Europe' discourse (Marx and Engels, 1992); but in Standing (2011) this 'spectre' is precarity and apparently does not haunt Europe alone.

If the conditions, which give birth to a proletariat are comparable to the context in which the precariat also find themselves, could their experiences be similar? Both groups share a subordinate position, whether with regards to capital or the State. Both are in vulnerable positions and lack access to meaningful remuneration, training, representation, benefits and progression potential. Both are likely to be in low-pay, low-skill work and likely to experience insecurity to a greater or lesser degree. The impact

of 'modernity' has, however, been 'atomising' (Beck, 2000) and prevented the precariat from (as yet) developing class-consciousness, while the proletariat's subordinate position could lead to the praxis of collective action and through it, the creation of a collective identity (Mészáros, 1986). Marx (1986) regards the proletariat's unity as a source of strength, while the absence of unity currently prevents the precariat from rallying behind a shared identity on a national, let alone international scale, the way the *Communist Manifesto* expects 'working men of all countries' to. Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the modern state has become a "manifestation of isolated individuality" (Mészáros, 1986:67) and, it seems, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has made this context even more individualised. Consequently, for Beck (2004:4) 'poverty is hierarchical' but 'smog is democratic' and, it seems, so is precarity and insecurity. Thus, the cumulative impact of various social and employment threats have atomised society and resulted in an individualised and an altogether different 'modernity' experience (Beck, 2000; Giddens, 1998). If this context, which Bauman (2006; 2000) aptly refers to as 'liquid modernity', atomises society as a whole, could precarious workers ever be united into a precariat and gradually develop class-consciousness? Conversely, if worker experiences are not fully determined by work structures, how can the precariat share sufficiently similar experiences of precarious work so as to move from a 'class-in-the-making', and towards a 'class-for-itself' (Standing, 2011:6)? If precariousness is individualised, are precarious workers likely to become organised and collectively resist their commodification and subordination in modern labour markets?

### *Positioning the Study against Existing Research*

The above questions enable me to position my investigation against the existing literature and present the rationale for my use of Social Identity Theory (SIT) to address them. Standing (2011) explicitly assumes that the precariat lacks a meaningful

professional identity, which adds to their generally negative experiences and insecure relationship with work. The sophisticated construction of the 'social identity' concept, of which professional membership is one aspect, however, suggests that the Standing's (2011) approach is, once again, reductively simplistic.

In this sense, individuals can 'identify' (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1974) with, or 'categorise' (Deaux and Burke, 2010; Haslam, 2001) in 'social groups' for a variety of reasons. These can range from attempts to reduce uncertainty by adopting pre-existing social categories, gain self-enhancement and improve self-esteem. While sustainable membership in a 'social identity' requires perceptions of similarity between the precarious worker and the 'in-group', just by categorising him or herself as part of a 'social group' precarious workers can exhibit bias against 'out-groups'. Even in the absence of 'internalisation' of the group's values and beliefs, membership can be meaningful to the individual (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). This is significant and has a number of consequences for my study.

First, while the precarious worker is aware of the stigma which society attaches to his or her type of work in line with Standing's (2011) argument, he or she is likely to show negative bias against the opinion of 'out-group' members and favour the views of friends and colleagues in the 'in-group'. The views of society as large do not disappear, nor cease to matter, but they may not matter as much as to create a sense of the alienation, anger and anxiety which Standing (2011) describes.

Second, the 'in-group' is constructed in relational to a number of 'out-groups' (Ashforth and Mael, 1989), rather than a simple, bi-polar opposition between an undifferentiated precariat and an equally-homogenous society. In this way the stigma which Standing (2011) assumes is not an absolute state, nor an inalienable characteristic of the

precariat identity. Low-pay and low-skill workers may compare less-favourably with higher-status and higher-pay groups of, for instance, medical professionals or chief executives. Nevertheless, the position of a precariat 'in-group' may compare more positively with a group of unemployed members of society.

Third, not only is the process of 'social comparison' likely to contain 'in-group' bias, but the 'social identity' itself is negotiable in line with 'social change' and 'social mobility' beliefs by workers (Trepte, 2012; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Thus, in line with a 'social change' belief, a precarious worker may compare his/her group with another group along different characteristics in order to achieve a positive comparison. Thus, a care assistant may negate their low pay, as well as the unpalatable aspects of their work by referring to the positive impact of their job on people's lives, the enjoyment of work, friendliness of colleagues and so on, an argument presented within participant narratives in Chapter 6. Even when such a positive comparison is not possible, and the worker is not able to leave the 'social group', he or she can re-define it on a higher level of abstraction (Haslam, 2001) and see themselves as being part of a wider network of, for instance, migrant workers (Castells, 2000).

The worker is, lastly, able to retain their unique distinctiveness within the group. Castells (2000) argues that individuals connect with bespoke social networks in modern, ICT-mediated 'network societies'. This network context is 'bespoke' and contains a plethora of social relationships ('in-groups'), with the individual at their centre. Furthermore, networks are 'customisable', constructed around the individual, and in line with person-specific preferences and interests. This argument, thus, supports the proposal that precarious workers may be able to form social and professional identities, even if they are not collectivised to form a class-conscious precariat. Moreover, the individual-social distinction need to be made in prescriptive, 'either-or' terms. Harré (1998) argues that



identity formation is a flexible process with no clear compartmentalisation or separation between individual identity characteristics, and those aspects acquired through 'in-group' membership. The 'identity' concept is, thus, a 'bridge' across multiple sources of personal and social identification with overarching importance for the individual and formative impact of their self-concept (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004). Given the complex construction of 'social identities', it seems unlikely that their positive impact on precarious workers' behaviours and attitudes will be overturned by the terms and conditions of work alone.

Given the consideration above, it is important to recognise that there were a number of theoretical venues, and correspondingly, a number of conceptual models, which I could have adopted in my thesis. Specifically, the inherently negative conceptualisation of precarious work contexts could have led me to investigate the experiences of low-pay, low-skill workers through the respective lenses of 'dirty' and even 'tainted' work (Tyler, 2011; Grandy, 2008; Kreiner et al., 2006a) and 'stigmatised' worker identities (Goffman, 1990; Ashforth et al., 2007; Ashforth et al., 2002). Those perspectives, however, present pre-formed categories of work, and carry inherent assumptions of what the corresponding experiences of workers would be. As a result of this, 'taint', 'dirt' and 'stigma' lenses provide a restricted, and predominantly negative reading both of the precarious jobs which I set-out to study, and the experiences of the workers within them. It is, thus, necessary to once again return to the 'workers themselves', in line with the phenomenological paradigm of my inquiry, and see how workers construct their precarious experiences, and whether worker 'intending' could be moderated through participation in other 'in-groups', which offer a more meaningful membership. A focus on individual narratives of precariousness, thus, not only provides the golden thread connecting different stages of the study, but serves as the anchor against the sway of

assumptions in existing approaches. The assumptions, for instance, that the British labour market is moving away (Doogan, 2015), or towards (Heery and Salmon, 2000) insecurity. Also, the assumption that short-term and low-pay jobs leads to insecure experiences of work (Standing, 2011), and a denizen position vis-à-vis both work and the State (Standing, 2015). Finally, the assumption that while individual variation across the precariat is possible, the collective experience is generally negative, and one of greater or lesser insecurity, physical and emotional harm (Standing, 2014; Clarke, et al., 2007).

Those assumptions may explain why there is little differentiation between the notions of 'precariousness' and 'precarity' in the literature, with Standing using the terms interchangeably, eventually replacing his use of the former (Standing, 2011) with the latter (Standing, 2014). Such broad conceptualisations riddle the 'precarity' concept with ambiguity, which, in turn, impedes the understanding of worker experiences through it. In recognition of this, it is necessary to study worker experiences through a different construct, one which is not already loaded with negative bias towards precarious experiences.

The construction of 'precariousness' as the umbrella term referring to the range of experiences which correspond to the context of precarity, therefore, has utility in itself, as it could advance academic understanding of a phenomenon central to experiences of modernity. An investigation from a phenomenological stand-point could also contribute to knowledge by capturing the richness of precarious experiences. Through this, it can comment on whether precarious work is bringing about a shared experience for low-pay, low-skill and so on workers, making them simultaneously 'dangerous' and 'endangered' or, instead, constitutes individualised experiences in both the positive, as well as negative ends of the working experience spectrum.

### *From Theory to Research –Sectors and Methodology*

A phenomenological methodology and a semi-structured method of interviewing seemed most closely matched to my research questions, as they would enable me to, along with Spradley (1979), tell my research participants that:

*“I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them”*

(Spradley, 1979 in Kvale, 1996:125)

I wish to accord my participants the position of co-researchers, rather than subjects, actively influencing and shaping the meaning being constructed in the interview (Coupland, 2007 in Pullen, et al., 2007). To ensure my approach offers as much flexibility and scope for my participants to steer the discussion towards a personally significant aspect of precarious work, my semi-structured approach explores the following, broad themes (see also Appendix A):

- Route into the current role (with prompts to discuss personal reasons and availability of choice)
- Experiences in the current role (with prompts to discuss expectations)
- Impressions of colleagues and employer (with prompts to discuss relationships)

These considerations make the investigation of precarious work and its corresponding experiences more challenging than the existing literature suggests. Initially, drawing a sample frame seemed straight-forward, and I was able to identify a representative group of precarious workers, for instance migrant workers in low-pay, low-skill and low-security roles. This group was extended to include other precarious occupations such as those

found in the cleaning, care and hospitality industries, as proposed by Savage, et al. (2013).

Reaching those workers, however, proved problematic as access to care facilities and hotels was not easily granted and when granted, participation varied. Furthermore, I needed a means through which to contact precarious workers, given the likelihood of a non-discriminate approach to work and taking-up any roles which were immediately available. I had planned to carry-out interviews with those migrant workers present in the organisations I approached yet, since organisational consent was not forthcoming, this proved an unproductive means for recruiting participants. Furthermore, I imagined that migrants in low-pay and low-skill jobs were not likely to have a good command of English, so engaging with, not to mention interviewing them in English, might be problematic. I concluded that the best strategy was to access a country-specific migrant network to facilitate contact with potential participants. Focusing on Bulgarian migrants seemed a straight-forward choice, as it would enable me to utilise my native knowledge of the language both in terms of carrying-out interviews and translating them back into English. Consequently, the total number of participants in my study was 94, engaged both through individual interviews and focus-groups. My sample includes migrants, nursery, adult care and zero-hour (who have no guarantee of being offered, nor are obliged to accept hours) workers. In my investigation, I also use the narratives of two focus groups with non-precarious workers, one comprising of local government employees and the other of private-sector members of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) for the purposes of contrast.

This, however, meant there was close proximity between me, as a researcher, and participants as co-researchers (Butler-Kisber, 2010), with both parties having a role in constructing the meaning of precariousness. Conscious of the potential risks this close

positioning could pose to the ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘authenticity’ of my findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 in Bryman, 2008; Holloway, 1997:160-161), I adopted several safeguards in my approach to interviewing and narrative analysis. Those are further discussed in Chapter 5: Paradigm, Methodology and Method.

The analysis of rich, qualitative narratives, providing “new insights into the subjects’ lived world” (Kvale, 1996), required a method of analysis which could accommodate this qualitative richness, without losing the essential meaning of the phenomena under investigation in non-essential details. In keeping with the phenomenological ‘golden thread’, I selected the method of ‘meaning condensation’ (Kvale, 2013; 1996) which is currently under-utilised in the study of precarity contexts and precarious experiences. Once again, Chapter 5 offers a more detailed discussion of how this process works in practice. In it, I also use an excerpt from an interview to exemplify the ‘meaning condensation’ method of analysis.

### *Thesis Structure*

The purpose of this final section of Chapter 1 is to introduce the thesis structure and provide a brief summary of the remaining chapters as follows:

In Chapter 2 I analyse the precarity of the British labour market and highlight the existence of a debate between the proponents of an ‘insecurity thesis’ (Heery and Salmon, 2002), and its challengers represented by Fevre (2007) and Doogan (2015; 2013). In the chapter I use ‘precarity’ as a term referring both to negative contexts of work and, correspondingly, negative worker experiences. This is demonstrated in Standing’s (2011) precariat construct, presenting precarious experiences as structurally-determined by the context of work, labour market, State policy and so on. I consider Standing’s (2011) model in detail and deconstruct it in order to evaluate its

theoretical assumptions. I also profile its member-base in order to create a sample-frame from my own investigation.

I trace the historic conceptualisations of 'precarity' in Chapter 3, and demonstrate the concept's ideological and theoretical ambiguity. For instance, this is the precarity of poverty in Polanyi (2000) and precarity of commodification in Marx (1986) and Mészáros (1986). Polanyi's (2000) analysis also informs the manifestation of precarity in conditions of 'flux', resultant from the pendulum movement between periods of state-led market regulation to laissez-faire market de-regulation. Finally, the precarity of 'individualisation' in a modernity context is framed through recourse to Castells' (2000) 'Network Society' thesis, Bauman's (2000) 'liquid modernity', and conceptualisations of 'risk' (Beck, 2000) and fear (Todorov, 2010). I use complex manifestations of 'precarity' in a range of historical contexts as the rationale to distinguish between precarious contexts and precarious experiences in my own study. Thus, I argue for the need to distinguish between precarity contexts, in order to study, rather than infer, the corresponding experiences of workers in those contexts.

Having differentiated between precarity contexts and precarious experiences, in Chapter 4 I challenge the structural determinism of the former, on the latter. Since Standing (2011) defines negative precariat experiences in collective terms, I also consider the existence of precariat 'sub-culture' (Cohen, 1980), as an indicator of intra-precariat cohesion. Finding insufficient evidence for collectively categorising the precariat as a 'class-in-the-making' (Standing, 2011), I investigate the capacity of the 'in-group', framed in SIT terms (see, for example Tajfel and Turner, 1979), to moderate the experiences of precarious workers.

In Chapter 5 I ground my study in a phenomenological paradigm of inquiry (Sokolowski, 2000), also outlining the epistemologically interpretivist proximity between me, as the researcher and my participants as co-researchers. Assumptions of reality as the subjective co-construction of social agents are, further, reflected in my study's constructivist ontology. I connect the adopted phenomenological foundation with a qualitative methodology, a semi-structured interview method and a phenomenological 'meaning condensation' method of analysis (Kvale, 2013; 1996). Conventional issues of sampling, trustworthiness and authenticity are also covered and I demonstrate the 'meaning condensation' method through an excerpt of migrant Gergana's interview.

In Chapter 6 I outline key findings from my interviews with typical precarious and contrasting participant groups. The chapter presents worker experiences on a group-by-group basis, moving from the migrant group, through nursery and adult care workers and the commercial and hospitality group, which includes 'Cleanwell' workers. The narratives of precarious workers are contrasted with participants from two non-precarious groups, those of local government employees and private-sector CIPD members. I continue the discussion of precarious experiences in Chapter 7 and combine participant narratives in three over-arching themes, of precariousness as a relational, pedagogic and moderated by the 'social group' experience. In contrast to literature framings of negative worker experiences, those themes suggest that precariousness is not absolute, but individualised. Furthermore, it is not an inescapable source of insecurity but can be a formative and positive experience, providing access to a meaningful social identity and 'in-group' support.

I discuss these findings through SIT in Chapter 8 and challenge the deterministic conceptualisation of precarious workers' experiences in negative terms. I also caution against predictions of worker collectivisation into a 'class-in-the-making' (Standing,

2011). I use Chapter 8 to develop an emergent typology of precarious experiences occurring between the poles of 'intending' work as a means ('people in work' [PIW]) and 'intending' work as an end in itself ('working people' [WP]).

Chapter 9 is the conclusions chapter of my thesis and in it I re-state key-findings of my investigation and trace its limitations in terms of design and conceptual framework. I conclude the chapter by proposing directions for future research and reflect on my own experiences along the PIW-WP spectrum.

Having provided an overview of the approach through which I investigate experiences of precarious work throughout the thesis, I now return to the beginning and start with an analysis of the precariat against the context of British labour markets in Chapter 2.



## CHAPTER 2: THE BRITISH LABOUR MARKET AND THE PRECARIAT

In Chapter 2 I investigate two conflicting perspectives on the direction in which the British labour market is developing, broadly described as the ‘insecurity thesis’ and the ‘rising security’ argument.

In the introductory chapter I described precarious experiences as necessarily occurring against a particular context, that of low-pay, low-skill work. This makes the context of precarious work a significant (albeit not solely significant) factor in studying the experiences of precarious workers. However, in Chapter 2 I do not separate precarious experiences from the working context. Instead, in investigating British labour market developments, I adhere to existing literature assumptions that precarious contexts generally give rise to negative worker experiences.

In doing so, I identify one particular social group which can be described as a low-income, ‘economic minority’ (Appadurai, 2006). This is Standing’s (2011) precariat, whose low-pay, low-skill participation in work is proposed to run a continued risk of employment network ‘disconnect’, and lead to a more intensely-negative and insecure experience. I structure the argument in Chapter 2 by:

1. Showing the contradictory evidence on whether the context of modernity has made the participation in the labour market a more-, or less-negative experience;
2. Tracing the economic and social theory assumptions upon which conceptual framings of economic minority groups, such as Standing’s (2011) are based on;
3. Profiling the precariat and evaluating the utility of its framing as the basis for this study’s sampling strategy and subsequent investigation.

### *Developments in the British Labour Market*

In his discussion of global inequality Joseph Stiglitz, former Chief Economist of the World Bank and 2001 Nobel Prize winner for Economics, points to its particularly high levels in Britain, making it second only to the US. Stiglitz sees the cause of this in Britain's emulation of the US model, which enables financial flows to have a significant economic impact (Stiglitz, 2013:xxiii).

This perspective contains parallels with existing framing of precarious labour, where commodification is continually reproduced by the 'centralisation' of capital flows within complex capitalist systems (Bowring and Fevre, 2014:144). In Stiglitz' (2013) analysis, therefore, 'finance' has a significant role in the UK labour market exemplified, for instance, by the impact of Libor, the London Interbank Offered Rate. The impact of Libor on Britain's economy is presented as a downward spiral, caused by artificial inflation of the lending rate so as not to reflect reduced intra-bank lending in 2007. The global financial market crisis which followed, led to global recession and the imposition of austerity measures in Britain, themselves necessitated by a fall in the gross domestic product, increase in unemployment, reduction of tax revenue and rising benefit costs. The resultant experience, within a British and a global context, according to Stiglitz, is one of general inequality (Stiglitz, 2013:xxiv-xxv).

Such an argument carries inherent Polanyian overtones and, specifically, Polanyi's (2001) notion of 'flux' periods, during which the State apparatus seeks to adjust in response to market changes (Chapter 3 considers this in greater detail). The issue, both in the instance of the US and Britain is the decreased state involvement in modern market operations, particularly visible in the "reduction in the progressivity of the tax system" (Stiglitz, 2013:xxx). This, in turn, can be placed within a wider argument which Fevre describes as the debate on whether the value of "social and collective provision

of welfare” outweighs the importance of individual freedom (Fevre, 2015:5). Stiglitz’ (2013) position is clear, and he proposes that insufficient state involvement through suitable market policy has a wide-reaching detrimental impact on social experiences of work and life in general. Stiglitz’s argument, therefore, points to the conclusion that the global economic reality, of which Britain is part, has moved towards greater inequality. This is likely to be even more pronounced for marginalised social groups, and make their labour market position even more insecure.

Although a detailed analysis of all economic factors behind the global financial crisis is beyond the scope of the study, the above consideration of central causes is important on several counts. First, it underlines the lack of differentiation between contexts and experiences in existing approaches. This is significant, as it highlights the implicit assumption that employment structures determine worker experiences. This is an assumption which, as I show later in the chapter, is shared even by arguments for rising employment security. Second, the high levels of inequality Stiglitz (2013) proposes justifies my focus on studying the experiences of those employment groups whose labour market position is likely to be particularly subordinate and unequal. Lastly, this argument demonstrates that such ‘economic minorities’ (Appadurai, 2006) are treated as a homogenous and undifferentiated ‘out-group’. This is specifically suggested by Stiglitz’ (2013) proposal for adopting progressive taxation in order to alleviate marginalised groups’ collective lot, an argument which echoes Standing’s (2011) own conceptualisation of the precariat. In Standing’s (2011) view, the precariat’s subordinate position in the labour market is fundamentally caused by the State’s failure to protect it from labour market pressures. In this sense, the precariat is forced to choose low-skill and low-pay jobs, so as to avoid the dangers of unemployment, which perpetuate its labour market vulnerability and alleged experiences of insecurity.

Some support for this view is found in data on UK labour market trends, which appears to follow the direction outlined by Stiglitz. The example of ‘underemployed’ workers, or those who are forced to take a part-time job due to the absence of full-time work, is just such an incidence of unequal labour participation. Their proportion of the UK workforce peaked at 10.8% in the period between 2012-2013, eventually settling to 9.9%, that is 3 million, almost 1 in 10 workers in 2014 (ONS, 2014). In those cases there is labour market participation but, as per Stiglitz’ (2013) argument, this is on unequal terms. Thus, for those 10% employment itself may not be a source of meaningful remuneration nor security.

Negative media treatment of rising use of over 1 million zero-hour contracts by UK employers is also a significant influencer of public opinion, prompting a number of studies seeking to understand the extent of the issue (see, for example, 2014’s *Casualization and Low Pay* by the Trade Union Congress and *Response to Government Consultation on Zero Hours* by ACAS<sup>1</sup>), as well as moderate views on the negative impact of this type of working arrangements (see, for example, 2013’s *Zero Hours Contracts: Myth and Reality* and *Zero Hours Contracts: Understanding the Law* by the CIPD<sup>2</sup>).

This data could be viewed through Standing’s (2011) precariat model, and the argument that worker subordination within a fragmented labour market is manifest through reduced access to meaningful remuneration. As such, it is supported by the Living Wage Commission’s (LWC) 2014’s *Working for Poverty* report. In line with Pantazis, Gordon and Levitas (2012), the report discusses alarming levels of poverty among the

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<sup>1</sup> ACAS is the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service is an independent body offering employment advice and guidance to employees and employers

<sup>2</sup> CIPD is the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the professional membership body for HR in the UK

UK's working population, occurring along a range of employment patterns, with more than 400,000 workers earning an income below a "socially-accepted standard of living" (LWC, 2014:6). Even seemingly secure employment, the report further states, does not guarantee a corresponding experience of social security, meaning that workers have to forgo family time and socialisation activities in order to work longer hours. This statement can be regarded as further evidence that in a context of modernity labour has expanded to take over all available time and, given the capitalist market economy context, having a predominantly negative impact on workers (Antunes, 2013; Mészáros, 1986).

Assumptions about the deterministic effect of economic conditions on personal experiences can be followed in Standing (2011), Beck (2000), Castells (2000) and, earlier, in Drucker (1989). Summarised briefly, such arguments for labour-market developments following a trend towards reduced security start with recognising the role of open state borders (itself a feature of modernity) and international labour supply to UK labour markets. In this sense, the increased availability of a certain type of skill in the market, whether through rising levels of education or a decrease in low-skill occupations since 1987 (Fevre, 2015), mean that certain worker groups have moved into precarious work. Those groups are the 'atavists' in Standing's (2013) precariat and are discussed in more detail below. This could, thus, be linked to the growth of the low-skill service economy, with 81% of English workers in service-sector roles and 9% in manufacturing in 2011, compared to 40% services participation and 38% manufacturing just over a century ago. Of those 81% of workers, 92% are likely to be women and 71% men (ONS Census Analysis, 2013). Unable to adapt or retrain, and in the absence of State support mitigating their precarious position, those worker groups are displaced from work and unable to re-join the labour market at a comparable level to that at which

they exited. Those groups now make-up Standing's (2011) precariat and are likely to be made-up of migrants, younger workers and women, engaged in temporary, part-time, fixed-term and casual (zero-hour) work. They could be underemployed and suffering from insufficient control over their income, or overemployed (working longer hours than they would choose to) and having insufficient control over their spare time. Either way, they present a precariat 'minority' (Appadurai, 2006), anxious, insecure and alienated (Stiglitz, 2013; Standing, 2011, see also Mészáros, 1986) from other-socio economic groups on account of their continued commodification. Despite having a distinctly precarious economic status 'in themselves', they lack the identity and class-consciousness of the subordinate proletariat before them. As a result, this labour commodification does not lead to collective action, and neither does it create a shared, work-based identity (Mészáros, 1986). As such, the precariat are unable to resist against their subordinate position, nor unite as a class in the name of a common struggle towards a common 'enemy' at least, for the time being (Clement, 2013; Kalleberg, 2013; Standing, 2011).

However, this argument is inherently structuralist in its assumptions, with little scope for variation in precarious individuals' experiences. It, furthermore, suggests a 'double-whammy' effect, where members of the precariat are likely to share in a high degree of insecurity but on account of the stigma (Goffman, 1990) associated with precarity, unable to develop a common, social identity.

### *Examining the Trend: Market Developments*

The starting point of my examination of market trends is Fevre (2007) and Doogan's (2013; 2009) arguments that discourses in support of all-out fragmentation of traditionally stable employment patterns are steeped in social theory, rather than empirical evidence. This, however, does not mean that the realities of modern

experiences are denied. Certainly, work seems to contain risk (see, for example, Mythen, 2004; Beck, 2004; Bauman, 2006) stress and insecurity (see, for example, Castel, 2000; Clarke et al., 2007; DeWitte, 2010) as well as the “ill-treatment” of employees (Fevre, et al., 2012). Insecurity has not gone away, and Fevre (2011) explicitly illustrates this through the rise of unemployment in the 1980s, peak in 1992/3 and subsequent decrease to a historic low in 2008, as well as the negative impact which the disappearance of low-skill routes into employment have on younger workers. Government policy, enabling or preventing worker acquisition of ‘cultural capital’ as the “knowledge, manners and tastes which provide the raw material of social distinction” (Fevre, 2012:8) are also of contextual importance, since they can enable movement along the employment network, and thus, impact worker experiences (Savage, et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, the resultant experiences of those contexts are elsewhere deemed less problematic, particularly in the context of UK labour markets. Regarding UK experiences in their collective, cultural context the Hofstede Centre’s latest (2010) inter-country data-set points to a low ‘uncertainty avoidance’ tendency. This implies higher tolerance of insecurity and short-termism by UK workers, arguably better culturally-equipped to cope with an environment where long-term security is not necessarily guaranteed. Such a view, however, comes across as too general and overly simplistic. Its challenge, therefore, to the ‘insecurity argument’ could be refuted on discursive grounds, as failing to acknowledge the individualised modernity context within which the UK labour market is positioned. Standing (2011; 2012) clarifies this by proposing that whether regarded as destructureation (Bauman, 2000); deregulation (Clement, 2013; Harvey, 2003; Esping-Andersen and Regini, 2000) or re-regulation (Standing, 2011; Warring, et al., 2008) labour market processes have an uneven impact upon employee

groups. In the instance of the precariat, this effect is unambiguously negative and turns its members into denizens (Standing, 2011; Bauman, 2006) and jobs (Clement, 2013), leaving some with no options but to join criminal underclasses, thus becoming criminals themselves. Although the foundation of these experiences is inherent in the position which workers, as personifications of labour (Antunes, 2013), hold vis-à-vis capital, the prolific fragmentation of employment pushes the balance of power further away from workers and towards employers. This is particularly so in a modern market context, where employers are able to use a growing pool of labour supply to their benefit, tailoring employment contracts and job descriptions to their business needs (Stiglitz, 2013; Standing, 2013).

Such a discourse is a case in point of how the 'insecurity thesis' (Heery and Salmon, 2000; Doogan, 2001) defines British labour market trends. It is through such a multi-disciplinary arsenal of social and ideological theoretical approaches that Standing (2011) and Beck (2000) formulate their models of structural determinism, regarding negative precarious experiences as symptomatic of a general labour-market condition. Antunes (2013) and Standing (2014) further argue that the negative impact of precarious work has entered the workers' private lives, also. This, for Standing, can be described as 'tertiarisation', that is, the blurring of employment and private boundaries. Thus, precarious work (Standing, 2011) takes over all free time (Antunes, 2013) and, in modern contexts, leads to precarious lives (Butler, 2000) and precarious people whose identity is that of stigma (Potter, 2014; Standing, 2011, see also Goffman, 1990). This trend is supported by the 2014 Employee Outlook Report, produced by the CIPD in partnership with Halogen Software, which comments on the reduced sense of 'procedural' and 'distributive' fairness in modern workplaces, against a context of widely negative experiences (Hoel, et al., 2014; Blader and Tyler, 2003). Since precarity



contexts imply negative experiences, those developments seem to support Standing's (2011) conclusion that an insecure precariat is emerging.

This 'rising precarity' discourse appears all inclusive and yet is challenged on its apparently strongest premise, one which seems so obvious that is frequently implied, rather than discussed. This is the assumption that the discourse is used to explain labour market data, rather than the other way around. The challenge is outlined in Doogan (2015a; 2015; 2013), who contests such an interpretation of data-sets as trends that support the argument that fragmented markets define the general insecurity of all and the precarity of some. Instead of arguing that modernity presents an altogether new reality of work, Doogan (2013) presents a perspective not dissimilar from Polanyi's (2001). Specifically, this is the argument that large-scale changes usher-in periods of 'flux', during which the State's apparatus is adjusting and re-setting in response to those changes, rather than being rendered obsolete by them.

This is the starting point, from which Doogan (2013) proposes an alternative interpretation which challenges the extent, although not the corresponding negative experiences, of structural, labour market precarity. His analysis re-affirms the role of the State within global flows and networks which, although fluctuating in times of change, retains its significance. Approaching the debate from such a Polanyian perspective, Doogan (2013:7) sees the State as an agent, intervening in labour markets and regulating labour market product flows, even in the face of information technology (ICT) transforming structures of organisation (Castells, 2006; 2000; Bauman, 2006; 2000).

This, in turn, has significant implications for the extent of labour market precarity assumed in earlier analyses, since social groups, even precariat ones, are not handled

like commodities by the market's 'invisible hand', nor are directly exposed to market pressures. For Doogan (2013), top-down welfare provision remains in existence, developed and implemented by the State apparatus. This does not deny the existence and growth of networks operating above and beyond national limits. Yet, for Doogan (2013), these developments are still the outcome of change and the result of strategic State policy, aimed at addressing demographic and economic pressures, such as expanding labour markets and global financial crises. As a result, casual and temporary forms of employment are neither examples of labour market precarity, nor likely to cause worker alienation. This does not mean that worker fears of job-loss and insecurity of what is presented as the 'end of the job for life' (Holmes, 2014; Auer and Cazes, 2003; Rifkin, 1995) are any less real, or have not impacted on worker behaviour. Thus, while he challenges the extent of precarity, Doogan (2015; 2013) fails to distinguish between contexts and worker experiences of those contexts. For him, precarity may not be as widespread but when it occurs, it is associated with negative worker experiences. Thus, developments in social and labour organisation which Žižek (2009), Bauman (2006) and Beck (2000) see as having an unprecedented impact, Doogan (2013) regards as not being altogether new. The impact of ICT is, in turn, reduced to an instance of technological change, and ultimately, as Drucker (1989) also argues, more efficient production through better application of knowledge. Doogan (2013) does not contest the role of ICT *per se*, yet draws parallels between modern, and Industrial era developments, such as the steam engine, the telegraph and the telephone (Doogan, 2013:3).

I, however, view such a perspective with a degree of caution and, in adopting modernity as a context of precarity; I align my approach with Castells (2000) and Bauman's (2000), to accept that modernity offers an ontologically different experience of work. Certainly,

the railway, telegraph and advent of atomic energy play a part in re-shaping social and socio-economic interactions yet it is the context of modernity which offers the paradox of both individualisation and network organisation (Castells, 2000). This corresponds to Haslam's (2001) discussion of the varied levels of abstraction along which personal identification with multiple social categories occurs and is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4. Interaction and association, thus, occur not only with those people immediately co-located but with abstract 'social groups' connected by ICT networks where, for instance, individuals can communicate with family members or migrants, with fellow nationals dispersed across the world. Globalisation, on the other hand, does not just make people aware of the existence of others the way a newspaper article does but physically brings otherness together. This magnifies the risks which events abroad pose on the State and the individual (Žižek, 2009; Beck, 2000) and can range from increased competition for jobs, to movement of people across state borders in order to seek refuge from terrorist organisations.

Doogan (2013), nevertheless, presents a counter argument against dominant approaches, and calls for their critical re-evaluation in the specific UK labour market context. Put briefly, he accepts that the labour market flexibility highlighted in Bourdieu (1998) and expressed either as 'flexibilisation' (Stone, 2006) or 're-regulation' (Standing, 2011; Harvey, 2003) is indeed a market reality but challenges the extent of its negative impact upon the labour market and worker experiences. Specifically, precarity is still a negative development yet, on the whole, it is preferable to unemployment because it enables workers to keep their jobs and stay employed, thus, a better option. In opposition to the 'insecurity thesis' (Lea, 2013; Heery and Salmon, 2002) Doogan (2013) builds on Munck (2013), and Auer and Cazes (2003), in order to propose that the general effect of flexible employment patterns in a modern context is one of

maintained, even *reduced* precarity, at least in the narrow sense of job security. According to this argument, using non-standard employment as evidence for the emergence of a precariat is exaggerated. Spencer (2012) agrees, and states that the social standing and employment objectives of part-time, fixed-term, low-skilled, student and so on workers cannot and should not be presented as a “common [precariat] alliance” (Spencer, 2012:689).

Analysing data from the European Labour Force Survey (ELFS) from the 1995-2013 Doogan (2015) agrees that market expansion has been in the form of part-time job growth, amounting to approximately 17 million new jobs, which carry with them an increase, up to 4.55%, in underemployment. That being the case, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development<sup>3</sup> (OECD) data shows that temporary employment in the UK remains fairly stable, albeit moving from 6.96% to 6.23% in the 2000-2013 period (Figure 1 below):

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<sup>3</sup> The OECD web-site lists the 34 members as: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK, USA.

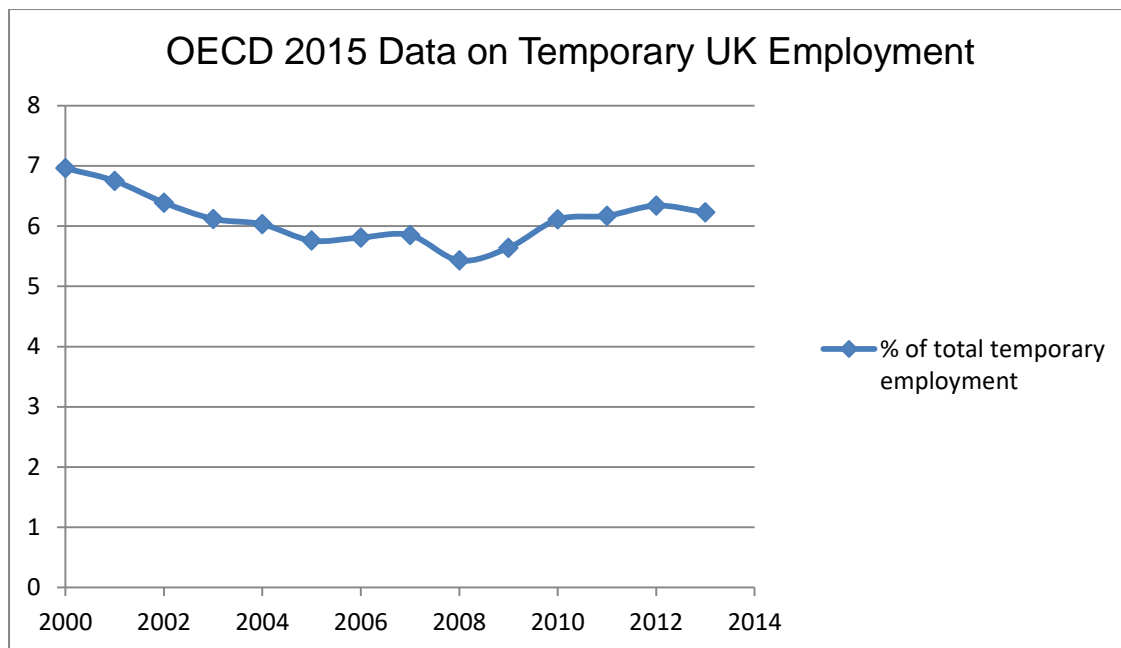


Figure 1: OECD 2015 data on temporary UK employment trends

Furthermore, non-permanent UK employees enjoy the same job protection against unfair dismissal and redundancy pay entitlement as their permanent counter-parts, provided their job tenure is of two years or more. The UK is also the only EU country where employees on non-permanent contracts are less than 25% of all new appointments in 2014 (OECD, 2014). UK unemployment is forecast to continue its downward trend into 2016 with 2015 employment levels for those ages between 15 and 64 reaching a record high of 72.6%, above the OECD (65.9%) and G7<sup>4</sup> (68.9%) average but below Germany and Japan (OECD, 2015). Doogan (2015) further suggests that these trends are across the board with European Labour Force Survey (EULFS) data evidencing the movement of job growth trends in a positive direction. An instance of this is the view that despite the growth in part-time employment and zero-hour contracts (Pennycock, et al., 2013); there is an overall increase in job tenure for men, as well as women, across part-time, as well as full-time contracts (Doogan, 2015a). As a case in

<sup>4</sup> G7 are Canada, France, Germany, UK, Italy, Japan, and the United States

point, in 2013, average tenure for men in full-time employment increased to 12 years and 11 months (an increase of 9%) and to 11 years and 6 months (9%) for women in full-time employment. The corresponding job-tenure for men in part-time employment, also in 2013, was 7 years and 11 months (9%) and 9 years and 9 months (17%) for women (Doogan, 2015). In other words, the increase of zero-hour contracts has occurred in parallel with growth in tenure. Furthermore, despite initial vilification in the media, workers on zero-hour contracts show similar level of satisfaction as permanent workers (CIPD Policy Report, 2015).

It is important to recognise, at this point, that although challenging the premise of modernity perspectives in general, the development of Doogan's (2015; 2009) arguments make a particular point. Specifically, Doogan (2015) argues that the growth of part-time work, as a significant labour-market development, should be left out of precarity formulations. As a result, not only is the discourse of growing precarity weakened by no longer being applicable to a major form of employment (part-time work), but the latter type of work is recognised as a source of job stability (Churchyard, 2015).

Even using European-wide data sets, however, highlights disproportionate experiences between those in standard, and low-pay work. To this effect the OECD (2015) survey finds high incidence of long-term, low-pay in the UK (approximately 15%), higher than the approximate 10% average. The incidence of low wages in the UK, in turn, could signal the start of a move towards the experience of poverty. Although regarded as having complex socio-economic causes, such as, the presence of workforce skills, the OECD (2015) overview of the resultant UK worker-skill profile appears to support Standing's (2011) precariat thesis by presenting an over-supply of low-skilled workers and an under-supply of high-skilled workers, resulting in greater-than-average

inequality. Even the entry of graduates into work and improved graduate opportunities appear unable to remedy this in a straight-forward manner given public sector cuts and job concentration in central areas such as London (Ball, 2014). The complexity of the analysis is, however, re-stated by pointing to a balance between strict State policies, requiring those economically inactive to look for work; and de-regulation such as the removal of 'exclusivity clauses' from zero-hour contracts, enabling those engaged in them to look for, and accept, additional work.

### *Challenging the Trend: Alternative Perspectives*

Having presented an alternative framing to labour market trends across the EU, which is also contextualised against recent OECD data on the UK, Doogan (2013) frames the relationship between labour market realities and corresponding worker experiences, as that of insecurity. Doogan (2015), further, builds on Fevre's (2007) earlier argument that dominant labour market discourses are not purely empirical studies but incorporate ideological and social theory elements. In this sense, the existence of worker insecurities is not a by-product of the fragmented and individualised neo-liberal modernity, but a direct outcome of government policies, discourses and media representations. The one-way directionality, from context to experience, is further demonstrated in Keenan and Sedmak (2011:297) who discuss policies of control. Specifically, those seek to curb unemployment by creating a 'job scarcity discourse' and, through this, encourage high levels of labour market participation and increased tenure as workers believe there is nothing 'out there'. This is a return to Bourdieu's (1998:82) "job insecurity is now everywhere" appraisal and the reason for rising awareness of the notion of precarious work in UK. I find evidence of the latter argument through a Nexus database search on the uses of 'precarious work' across all UK publications by year since 2004, when Barbier's (2004) comment on marginal uses of the term in the UK first

appeared. Figure 2 below demonstrates the sharp rise of term use, despite its specialist overtones, from zero appearances in 2004 to 28 in 2014:

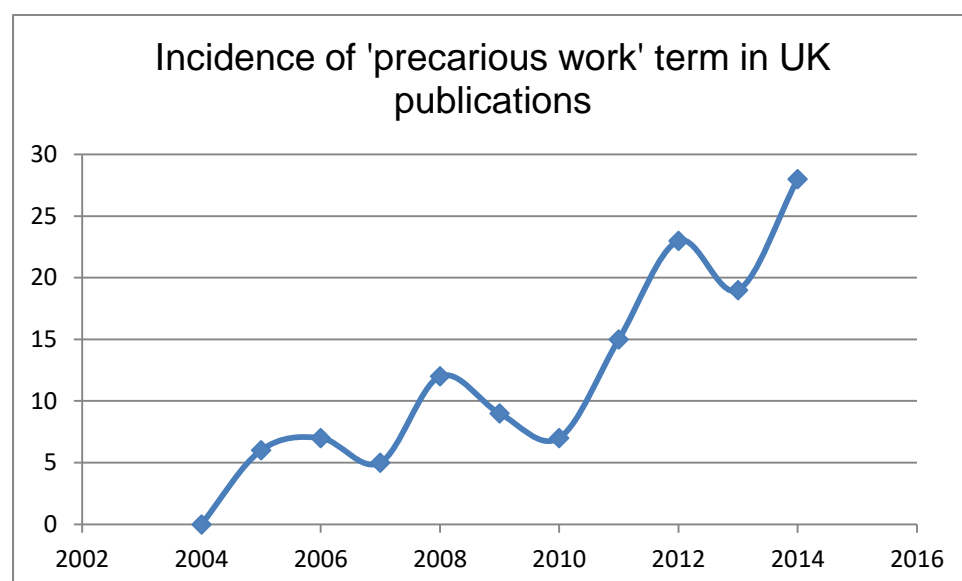


Figure 2: Incidence of the term 'precarious work' in all UK publications

The rise of term uses appears linked to applications in a predominantly negative working context (with the notable exception of Morgan, et al.'s, 2013 study of younger workers in Australia), for instance, employment insecurity, despite some evidence of rising tenure and falling unemployment (ONS Labour Market Statistics, 2016; Doogan, 2013). In order to contextualise this, I consider data from the fifth and sixth Workplace Employment Relations Studies, that is, WERS 2004 and WERS 2011. Although representative of worker experiences across the UK, these sources are not approached without a degree of caution. The reason for this caution is the use of high-level data, whether UK or European-wide, which can mask important variations in the conditions and experiences of 'outsider' workers (Emmenegger, 2012; 2009). An example of those are groups of precarious migrant workers whose views might not be represented in large workplace surveys, nor qualitative variations across generally secure full-time and permanent workers, or generally precarious part-time, temporary, agency, zero-hour



and so on workers. In turn, this runs the risk of proposing a relationship between precarious work and experiences on account of social theory, rather than use social theory as an explanation of relationships constructed through dialogue with precarious workers.

The evaluation of data from both surveys is, therefore, reviewed not only in terms of evidence but, where possible, considered in terms of inherent assumptions behind their measures. In line with this, both WERS 2004 (Kersley, et al., 2005) and WERS 2011 (van Wanrooy, et al., 2013) are nationally-representative surveys with a mixed-methods design and, therefore, comprising of questionnaires and face-to-face interviews with managers, employees and employee representatives. Nevertheless, the overview of work and employment presented within them utilise simple (in the sense of non-complex, rather than simplistic) categories such as job-security, well-being, tenure and so on. Even though those categories have their use in the study of labour market structures, they have insufficient 'breadth' to capture the complex social, economic and ideological overtones of the precarious experience. The absence of academic consensus on whether labour market developments have moved towards, or away from precarity, or what the impact on precarious workers is, means the WERS data can infer, but not directly comment on precarious experiences. Furthermore, and perhaps cognisant of the complex framing of the 'insecurity' construct, WERS focuses on the testing of security, rather than having to define what framing of insecurity they apply and the security measure in WERS 2011 is as follows:

Q.	Wording	Measured
A5c	Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your job?  I feel my job is secure in this workplace	Likert scale, ranging from 'strongly agree' (1) to 'strongly disagree' (5)

Table 1: WERS 2011 measure of job security

This, however, does not fully resolve the matter of complex framing as this WERS question conflates circumstances of quantitative security, that is, security resulting from a permanent contract and *feelings* of security, which are complexly formed. As a result of this, such a measure of employee attitudes and experiences masks the hidden social theory (Fevre, 2007) and ideological (Doogan, 2013) depth of security-based constructs.

At the same time, WERS shows a small decrease in the percentage of those who strongly agreed that their job is secure, 19% in WERS 2004, to 17% in WERS 2011. There is also a decrease in the 'job security' component of job satisfaction with the percentage of those who were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' decreasing from 65% (WERS 2004) to 59% (WERS 2011). Related to that and possibly reflecting the scope for individualisation in the modern workplace foreseen by Bourdieu (1998) and asserted by Bauman (2000) and Beck (2000), there is an increase in positive attitudes to scope for using initiative and influencing the work being done, task allocation and task ordering which resulted in a greater sense of achievement. At the same time, and in line with the 'tertiarisation' argument offered by Standing (2011) above, employees are more likely to feel 'tense', 'worried' or 'uneasy' on account of work, as per Figure 3 (van Wanrooy et al, 2013:40-41).

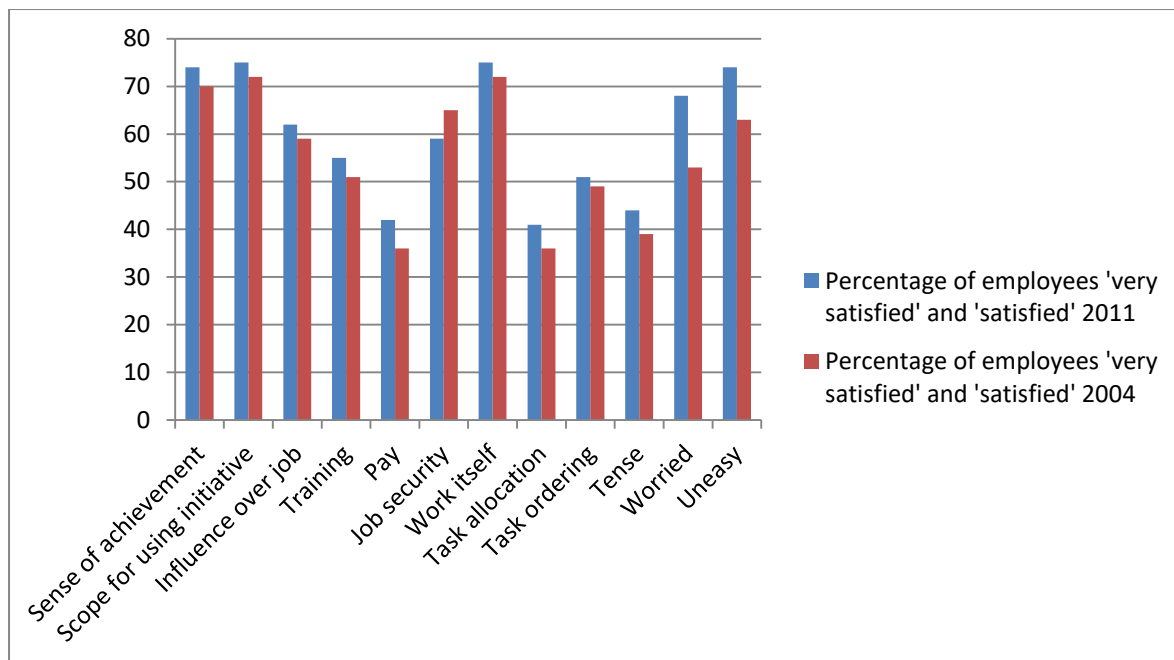


Figure 3: Comparison of job experience components of worker attitudes in WERS 2004 and WERS 2011 (source: van Wanrooy et al., 2013:40-41)

These findings show nuances within the rising security of labour market conditions proposed in the arguments above. Thus, it may be taken to reflect the rising individualisation and choice argument in Bourdieu (1998), Bauman (2000) and as containing evidence of growing overlap between private and work-life experiences (Standing, 2011). As an example, the period between WERS 2004 and WERS 2011 sees a decrease in flexitime and reduced-hours provisions with nature of work and working hours being the most frequent reason for refusal (van Wanrooy, 2013:32-33). The significant role of ICT, as argued for by Castells (2000) appears reflected in the high incidence (48%) of new or updated technology, which in 19% of workplaces was rated as the most important workplace change, ahead of work organisation changes (16%), changes in working times and even performance-related pay (3%) (van Wanrooy, 2013:20-21).

Aware of this complexity, and perhaps referring to Standing (2011), Doogan (2015a; 2015) opposes collectivist grouping of workers into new class categorisations, rising or otherwise. Having argued that growth in part-time employment across EU states could not be included as evidence for class-like precariat groupings, Doogan (2013) also warns of the presence of non-permanent workers in high-skill roles. He argues that 'contingent' workers (engaged on a non-permanent basis) appear in managerial and professional (21-30%) as well as semi-skilled or manual (24-27%) roles (Doogan, 2013:153). Thus, members of Standing's (2011; 2014) precariat could also be skilled members of professional groups, in precarious work but without negative precarious experiences. Standing's (2014) latter work explicitly acknowledges this point and points to the increased use of casual contracts in, for instance, education, a trend paralleled in UNISON's 2015 zero-hour factsheet. The argument for 'de-professionalisation' of teaching (Mooney and Law, 2007; Gilroy, 1993) through the use of, for example, teaching assistants in schools, greater deployment of parents as voluntary assistants in primary and infant settings, as well as doctoral students as associate lecturers, could be added to this.

Having equated worker experiences with contexts, Doogan (2015) also suggests that workers can feel insecure even in nominally non-precarious contexts, for instance, when workers expect or even fear a change. This point appears as a marginal consideration in Doogan's (2013) analysis but a significant one for mine since it offers a useful point of distinction between precariousness, as the experience of precarity contexts, and insecurity. Doogan's (2013) observation refers to conceptualisations of subjective insecurity (DeWitte and Naswall, 2003; Sverke and Hellgren, 2002), which reflects subjective worker fears and is, thus, a psychological state. Furthermore, such manifestations of insecurity can occur in isolation from the present context of work,

which can, conceivably, be one of high-pay and a permanent contract. In contrast to insecurity, which can occur within and outside the current context of work, I conceptualise precariousness as always bound within the context of precarious work. Unlike insecurity, precariousness can be a positive experience, yet even then, it is constructed through the phenomenological 'intending' (Sokolowski, 2000) of an objective reality. It, thus, incorporates conscious worker experiences of, and attitudes towards an actual low-pay, low-skill context of work, and not a possible future context.

Certain groups are, furthermore, more likely to be engaged in forms of contingent and precarious work and Standing (2014a; 2014b; 2013) proposes that the precariat can be classified into three main groups, the 'nostalgics', the 'atavists' and the 'progressives'. Respectively those groups are likely to be populated by immigrants; former working class and now low-pay and low-skill workers; and graduates, unable to find work in line with their qualifications. Despite of the different routes by which each of those groups enters the precariat, they are likely to share an equally commodified, insecure and alienated social-economic status, as well as the stigma identity of denizens (Standing, 2011). Savage, et al.'s (2013:243) representative study of professional self-identification trends in Great Britain's population further claims to offer evidence, not just of the presence of a precariat class in Great Britain, but points to the roles of a carer and cleaner as occupations over-represented within it.

By rejecting the theoretical premise behind narratives of market fragmentation and consequent emergence of short-term jobs, or 'McJobs' (Goos and Manning, 2003), Doogan (2009:30) is able to challenge the size of the precariat minority but not its existence altogether. Nevertheless, for Doogan (2013) and De Witte and Näswall (2003) precarious constructs rely excessively on dualist market theory, envisaging the existence of a stable core and a precarious periphery (see also Atkinson and Meager,

1986). In this sense, stability serves as the means of dividing workers, and since it is deemed inherently absent (see, for example, Standing, 2011:10), core workers are endowed with 'functional flexibility', while contingency workers become numerically-flexible, and 'flexploited' (Costello and Levidow, 2002) and suffer detriment as 'outsiders' (Emmenegger, 2009). Consequently, the former could adapt to their employer needs and stay connected to the network, moving to meet its demand (compare with Castells, 2000). Contingency workers, however, orbit along the precarious periphery, coming and going in line with employer needs (Doogan, 2013:149; Beck, 2000). Is this not enough to create a precarious group of workers? Doogan (2013) recognises this connection yet deems it tenuous and circumstantial. He, nevertheless, appears equally reductive and based on high-level trends in EU-wider datasets, giving little attention of nuances and variations in workers experiences within precarious contexts.

### *Profiling the Precariat*

Whether regarding market re-organisation as the outcome of capital flows or State policy in response to new pressures, such as market entry of internationally-mobile workers, the emergence of precarious economic minorities cannot be ignored. This creates the need for considering them through models considering their emergence and experiences.

For De Witte (2010:159) precariat experiences are broadly based on their reduced ability to share in "important (financial, social, societal) resources". Put briefly, the precarity of their experience is caused by lack of long-term certainty that social participation could be maintained as argued earlier. Standing (2014) develops this further by suggesting that notions of social capital (Bourdieu, 1998) are inappropriate in the instance of the precariat as this implies the ownership of a surplus, which they do

not have. Consequently, the best the precariat could hope for is access to a 'social income', as a means of remuneration for their participation in the labour market. This conceptualisation is developed as part of Standing's (2014; 2013, 2011) precariat framework, categorising precarious workers into a rising class which, although non-homogenous and lacking a meaningful professional identity, has a shared lack of work-based securities. The inherent complexity of this framing, therefore takes on both ideological dimensions, on account of the Marxist theory on which it is built, as well as empirical ones due to the sheer heterogeneity of member groups, which in Standing (2011) are derived from macro-level data sets.

Standing's (2014) construction of the precariat, also, cannot be exclusively associated or limited to a definite range of jobs or groups of people, despite the shared characteristic of low-pay, low-skill, short-term and low-scope for progression, work. Standing (2011) recognises that there may be individual variations in worker experiences, but his classification seems perfunctory in dividing the precariat into, essentially, more-insecure ('groaners') and less-insecure ('grinners') workers. Standing (2014; 2011) is quick to point out that both groups are likely to participate in an overarching experience of insecurity which reduces his 'winners and losers' taxonomy into a homogenised conceptualisation of 'losers and bigger losers'. At this point there are a number of parallels that could be drawn between Standing (2011) and Antunes' (2013:xix) "class-that-lives-from-labour" with labour available on temporary, flexible, subcontracted and even cyber terms. For Antunes (2013:82) this is not a new class formation, not even a fledgling class but, simply, Marx's proletariat up-dated to reflect the new realities of work. The realities, in other words, of part-time, fixed-term, zero-hour and other "hyphenated" work, which negative connotation were questioned and rejected by Doogan (2009).

Standing (2011) seems to share with Antunes (2013) the premise that precarity is the result of absent labour market security, especially in the instance of those for whom labour provides a basic (or only) livelihood. At the same time, the two perspectives differ on theoretical grounds with Antunes (2013) placing precarity of labour at the centre of his construct and Standing (2011) referring to the precarity of modernity. Consequently, the former model sees modern precarious developments as an extension of historical trends, while the latter regards them as a distinctly new development. In line with this, Standing (2014) argues that the precariat is not a 'proto-proletariat', or a group of workers on their way to becoming a proletariat on account of shared (subordinate) position vis-à-vis capital. They have a distinctive position from the proletariat, and are forced to carry-out a range of non-remunerated activities, to participate in the labour market. Described by Standing (2014:152) as 'work-for-labour', those may be job search on-line or in the paper, visa applications, completion of benefits claims forms and so on. Such activities are common to all three precariat types, including the 'nostalgics' (migrants and minorities'), 'atavists' (former working class and currently low-skilled and low-paid) and 'progressives' (well-educated but without access to stable employment). It is precisely such overflows of labour activities into private time, or 'tertiarisation', which results in the unique but, nevertheless, commodified position of the precariat and grants them the potential of becoming 'dangerous' (Standing, 2011) on three counts.

First, mainstream political parties do not represent precariat interests. The precariat is not a fully-formed class on account of its member diversity, which prevents their representation in mainstream politics, potentially causing anomie and orientation towards extremism and violence. The violent British protests of 2011, described by Prime Minister David Cameron as manifestations of a 'broken society' are a case in



point (Stratton, 2011) of discontent on account of mainstream policies unable to represent the needs of under-privileged groups. Second, the precariat does not display 'in-class' solidarity, due to the lack of a meaningful, work-based identity. Third, the precariat is becoming dangerous when the preceding factors are magnified by the absence of State support (Standing, 2014:29-32). As a consequence, the precariat are denizens, both in the sense of having reduced access to civic and employment rights, and through the possible merger with criminalised under-classes, causing the precariat to become a dangerous, that is 'lumpen' precariat (Standing, 2014; 2012; see also Bauman, 2006). The precariat also occupy a distinctive place in the re-structured socio-economic hierarchy of UK society, namely the polar opposite to those who are affluent, but above the unemployed.

Support for such social re-structuring across Great Britain is found in Savage et al.'s (2013) analysis of data from BBC's 2011-2012 *Great British Social Class Survey* with 161'400 respondents and a second, complementary and representative face-to-face survey with 1026 respondents. Their research, furthermore, identifies the precariat as a distinctive group within the new social-class structure. The research offers particular utility in being able to comment on those employment categories which were over-represented in the precariat, as well as each of the new classes. To do so, Savage et al. (2013:221-223; 225-227) adopt a three-phase categorisation process, beginning with "community standing", followed by "skill level and resultant economic position" and ending with Bourdieu's triad of social (the presence of contacts across formal or informal networks), economic (income saving and general wealth levels) and culture (adoption of high or popular culture) triad.

In the context of modernity, class 're-structuring' has given rise to closely-related 'plutocratic' or 'elite' groups, positioned towards the top of the social hierarchy and

consist of high-skilled and globally-mobile professionals. Those groups are closely matched to Castells' (2000) "networkers"; Beck's (2000) "Columbus class" and Stiglitz's (2013) '1 per centers' of wealthy and influential individuals. The 'elite' are endowed with high-levels of 'cultural', 'social' and 'economic capital' and are represented by Chief Executives, Directors, Judges and so on (Savage et al, 2013:220; 231). Standing (2011) sees the elite followed by the "salaried" with its stable work opportunities, room for development of niche skills, access to training and so on. This is followed by the entrepreneurial class of "proficians". They are followed by the "technical middle class" with its pilots, higher education teachers, and the "new affluent workers" represented by electricians and retail assistants (Savage et al, 2013:232). The working class with its technicians and cleaners are next in Standing (2014, 2012, 2011), while Savage et al (2013) place "emergent service workers" with bar staff and chefs below them. Both Standing (2011) and Savage et al. (2013) agree that the precariat is next, at the bottom of the working hierarchy and produced by the class 're-structuring' occurring alongside the transformation of modern British workplaces.

At this point, it is important to recognise the existence of an alternative analysis of the changes referred to as class 're-structuring' above. Contrary to Savage et al. (2013) and Standing (2011, 2014) the British Social Attitudes 30 (BSA 30) survey (Park, et al., 2013) claims there has been a continuity of social class categories since the 1980s. For instance, the number of people who identify themselves as working-class has remained mostly unchanged, from 70% in 1980, to 66% in 2012. BSA 30, therefore, presents a paradoxical development. Class identification over the past 30 years remains generally unchanged, yet this is accompanied by a weakening of the role class membership has on individual attitudes. In other words, as class membership is no longer associated with certain political ideologies, and British society is more diverse, individualistic and

multi-cultural, class membership is no longer a significant predictor of social attitudes. Does this mean that the latter can be moderated by individual identity aspects, both ethnic and cultural, which identities could be individually constructed (compare with Castells, 2000) and no-longer 'atavistically' (to use Standing's, 2014a term) inherited? Standing (2011) disagrees and points to the (assumed) largely negative experiences of the precariat as a result of their relationship to work as evidence for his claim.

Moving into the precariat, Savage et al. (2013:230) offer a broad framing of its size, as between 1% and 15% of Great Britain's population. According to Standing (2011; 2013; 2014, see also Dean, 2012), it is a rising class of denizens in a political, as well as economic sense. The latter is caused by the absence of seven types of work-based security, which have a cumulatively-negative impact. Those characteristics offer a comprehensive framing of the precariat experience and incorporate socio-economic theory, necessitating a more detailed consideration. An overview of the seven components Standing proposes is available in Table 2 and a more detailed analysis follows :

<i>No.</i>	<i>Type of Security Which The Precariat Lacks</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>
1	Labour market security	Refers to financial security through employed participation in the labour market. This is exemplified by a labour market environment with low levels of unemployment and high availability of permanent jobs.
2	Employment security	Applies to terms and conditions which put in place contractual safeguards against arbitrary (for instance recruitment and dismissal) employer practices.
3	Job security	Is the outcome of having specialist or niche skills, which result in high worker employability.
4	Work Security	Whilst item No. 2 protects the duration of the employment relationship, this refers to protection from risks to the health, safety and well-being of the individual. This can be possibly expressed as both the existence of a policy framework, and adherence to it by suitably-trained managers and workers.
5	Skill reproduction security	Is a factor reflecting the presence of opportunities for training and development, in order to enhance existing skills, perhaps into the niche specialism needed for item No. 3
6	Income Security	Is an umbrella term for a number of political and legislative factors, such as a minimum wage, availability of 'top-up' benefits, and so on.
7	Representation security	Refers to the existence of employee voice, whether individually or collectively through trade unions, and the corresponding exercise of bargaining power.

Table 2: An overview of the seven types of work-related security which the precariat lacks (adapted from Standing, 2011)

First is the lack of 'labour market security'. Although Doogan (2015) has proposed that present conditions are moving in the direction of labour market security, Standing (2011) does not see this as being the case at the moment. Specifically, in his later work, Standing (2014) proposes that labour market security requires not only the presence of jobs but meaningful labour remuneration without danger of falling into poverty. Auer and Cazes (2003) remind that stable jobs are not necessarily 'good' jobs per se and Doogan (2015) discusses rising job tenure and decreasing unemployment, which suggest that this indicator is problematic. Yet, for Standing (2014) it addresses increases in underemployment and on-the-job poverty, the latter being the highest on record for the UK (Living Wage Commission Report, 2014). Resultant financial concerns for UK workers and 'financial fragility' of households appear as further causes for high levels of stress at work and associated with negative worker experiences (Evans, 2016; Burt, 2016)

Second is the absence of 'employment security'. Standing's (2011) conceptualisation of 'employment security' appears to be constructed on existing frameworks. For instance, it comes close to the notion of 'organisational justice', an umbrella term for the experiences of fairness at work (Greenberg, 1990; Dulebohn and Martocchio, 1998). In this sense, lack of employment security could be experienced as the absence of either 'distributive' or 'procedural justice', that is, fairness of individual outcomes from work interactions, and fairness of employer procedures, processes, rules and practises; respectively (Blader and Tyler, 2003; Lind et al., 1997; Greenberg, 1990). As Fevre et al. (2012, 2011) remind this is a complex framework, which potentially encompasses a range of 'ill-treatment' behaviours. In line with this, research by the CIPD suggest that bullying and harassment experiences are among the most prevalent examples of missing 'employment security' with 11% of workers in

the UK-representative sample admitting to experiencing it (CIPD Employee Outlook, 2013).

Third is the unavailability of 'job security'. De Cuyper et al. (2014) and Sverke et al. (2002) explicitly link its absence with reduced scope for hierarchical progression for employees. This may be on account of the absence of niche skills and high-demand specialisms which, according to the OECD (2015), are in insufficient supply across the UK labour market. At the same time, a high-demand specialism, for instance one associated with the role of a CEO or a barrister in Savage et al.'s (2013) study, does not guarantee job-security, despite being well-remunerated. Sverke, et al.'s (2002) review of insecurity literature supports this anomaly by finding conflicting evidence on the reverse relationship between niche job specialisms and levels of insecurity. As already observed, Doogan (2015) also argues that experiences of insecurity can occur in isolation of the present context of work, the way fear of lying could not be removed by flight-safety statistics.

Fourth is the lack of 'work security'. While the previous item of 'employment security' addresses 'fairness' in a much broader, organisational justice sense, 'work security' can be linked to physical and emotional injuries at work. This, again, could be the experience of "ill-treatment" and specifically, bullying and harassment and even the experience of violence at work (Fevre, et al., 2012, 2011). Žižek (2009) stratifies the violence category further by considering violence from people, that is, 'subjective' physical violence, and 'objective' violence and mistreatment of individuals by institutions. In the latter instance this may be the lack of suitable health and safety policies, whilst instance of the former may point to lack of adherence to them. Nevertheless, individual identity characteristics, both demographic and cultural such

as gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and disability appeared to moderate the impact on the negative experiences above (Standing, 2014; Potter, 2014).

Fifth is the absence of 'skill reproduction security'. Examples of precariat members experiencing low 'skill reproduction security' are graduates taking employment according to the subject area of their qualification, rather than low-pay jobs with minimum qualification requirements. This is a crucial case in point, as education is a significant route into intrinsically and extrinsically meaningful employment (Standing, 2014; Doogan, 2013; Spencer, 2012). Development of skills in line with a worker's own preference, choice and so on can, thus, combat his or her commodification and allow a move away from transactional 'labour', and into fulfilling 'work' (Standing, 2014). Opportunities are not guaranteed, however, and even a graduate education could require its owner to 'labour-for-work', for instance, by spending time as an unpaid intern. Changing the perspective, the demand on higher education outcomes is, arguably, resulting in commodification of the educational system to fit 'client' needs. One particular implication of this is the flexible organisation of higher education and resultant precarity of academic staff (Mendelsohn, 2013; Gill, 2009).

Sixth is the unavailability of 'income security'. Although not explicitly present in his original (Standing, 2011) discussion, Standing (2014) subsequently recognises the importance of living wage-comparable income which, as highlighted by the Living Wage Commission's (LWC) 2014 report still proves a stumbling block on the way to "income security" even for dual-income families. Specifically, as the number of workers paid below the living wage benchmark has increased by approximately 400,000 in 2014. The immediate implication is that the largest proportion of UK poor, one in five, is in employment, itself a stark reminder of the precarity through poverty discussion in chapter two (LWC Report, 2014:6). It is necessary, at this point, to

acknowledge Povey et al.'s(2013) findings that the impact which income has on wellbeing can be mitigated by a range of identity and socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender and marriage status.

Last in Standing's (2011) profiling of precarity is the lack of 'representational security'. Pollert and Charlwood (2009:344-345) are also concerned with the impact of this item in Standing's (2011) model. In this instance, lack of Union membership reduces bargaining power across the employment board and has the consequences of financially hindering wider worker groups. Findings of the Living Wage Commission (LWC) 2014 report specifically point to the financial vulnerability of female, young and disabled employees, as well as those working more fragmented working patterns, that is, 'part-time or casual workers' (LWC Report, 2014:19). This, in turn, suggests that increased tenure across part-time and full-time roles in Doogan (2015) results in a disproportionate and, specifically, disproportionately precarious, experience for precariat groups and 'outsiders' (Emmenegger, 2012, 2009).

The inherent assumptions of structural determinism, from context to working experiences is, thus, not unique to Standing's (2011) and can be illustrated by pointing out a number of commonalities between his, and Kalleberg's (2013:3-6) 'good job' model. Informed by a longitudinal study of US employment over the 1970- 2000 period, Kalleberg (2013) also recognises the need for meaningful rates of pay and scope for progression, if a role is to be both fulfilling and worthwhile. Kalleberg (2013) further discusses the significant role of 'fringe benefits', job autonomy and workload control and control over the duration of work.

Despite the similarities in the Kalleberg (2013) and Standing's (2011) model universal agreement on the external employment reality within which precarious workers are



situated, is missing. What is more, the argument for negative array of experiences which Standing (2011; 2014) believes to stem from the precariat's position of socio-economic subordination appears to be constructed through the use of social theory discourses. It is, thus, necessary to assess the limitations of Standing's (2011) model by uncovering its inherent, ideological assumptions.

### *Summary*

Despite complementing each other, Standing (2011) and Kalleberg's (2013) models are based on structural determinism. Thus, they make inferences about individual worker experiences, but without empirically investigating the views and opinions of the workers themselves. Standing's (2011) precariat model is not without utility since by defining a precariat grouping in social, political and economic terms provides the theoretical grounds on which it could be distinguished from those of other 'social groups', its members identified and their experiences investigated. At the same time Standing's (2011) does not account for other factors, for instance, worker identities on the shaping of differentiated worker experiences. As an example, BSA 30 offers research-based (rather than social theory) evidence for the role which aspects of individual identities (both demographic and cultural) play in the moderation of working experiences. In line with this recognition of factors able to moderate the impact of employment structures, precarious jobs can be viewed as insufficient antecedents for negative experiences, and permanent and well-remunerated employment - a deficient safeguard against them.

In line with this, Chapter 2 considered the complexity of UK Labour market trends against OECD 2015, WERS 2004 and WERS 2011 data. Unemployment levels seem to be decreasing, which corresponds to an expansion of underemployment and growth of part-time jobs. Part-time jobs are offering longer tenure, both in the instance of men

and women, yet this appears to mask experiences of on-the-job poverty, affecting some groups (younger workers and women) more. There is also an over-spill of work into private worker lives resulting into a rise in the experiences of tension and stress as a result of work changes. At the same time, comprehensive precariat conceptualisations as the one considered above, find some empirical support in representative surveys such as the Living Wage Commission's (2014) report and WERS 2011. It does more than simply update the proletariat construct for the new millennium and proposes the existence of a new, marginalised economic minority. The range of insecurities experienced by the precariat are neither altogether new, nor is their formulation hugely divergent from historical manifestations such as, for instance, the precarity of labour, poverty and modernity, in the preceding chapter. The precariat sometimes lack contractual safeguards against arbitrary employer discrimination and have potentially low protection from risks to their health and well-being. Their access to training, and representation, is limited as a result of which their potential for hierarchical progression is also potentially diminished. Taken together, those factors also diminish their potential earning capacity and the ability to attain financial security through their labour.

Its thorough and multi-dimensional framing notwithstanding, the precariat framing is, nevertheless, an inherently collective construct with under-utilised ability to differentiate among, or attach importance to individual experiences. It, furthermore, under-plays the scope for worker agency behind the positive experience of precarious contexts, and insecurity fears despite secure contracts. In recognition of this, chapter four expands this theoretical dimension by considering the role which individual and social identities have in differentiating and moderating the precariat experience. Despite the above limitations, Standing's model has conceptual value in its ability to

offer a set of objective criteria through which to frame the context of precarious work, as a backdrop for the precariat's experiences. Equally, in their reliance of large sets of data, criticisms from alternative approaches fail to render the precariat framework completely unusable.

Considerations of this nature, thus, prevent me from rejecting Standing's (2011) construct in its entirety but, rather, identify and address its limitations. I do so by reviewing the ideological ambiguity of the 'precarity' term in Chapter 3, which leads me to propose a terminological distinction between the *precarity* of working contexts and the *precariousness* of worker experiences.

## CHAPTER 3: THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF 'PRECARITY'

In Chapter 3 I explore historical conceptualisations of 'precarity', and trace the boundaries of the concept to the point where it overlaps with other social models. I begin the chapter by offering a brief etymology of the term, and then consider the manifestation of 'precarity', as poverty, commodification, flux and individualisation. The precarious quality of each of these contexts is, in turn, expressed and determined by their opposition to, respectively, the State, capital, change and modern networks of 'social groups'.

Each of the above categories is complex and framed in socio-economic theory. The purpose of the chapter, however, is not to summarise all available academic discourses dealing with each context, but demonstrate the ambiguity of the 'precarity' construct in relation to them. Furthermore, I use this conceptual ambiguity to propose the theoretical distinction between objective precarity contexts and subjective precarious experiences.

### *Meanings of Precarity*

The notion of precarity is by no means new, yet its academic 'pedigree' does not imply a consistent understanding of what context it should be applied to. As already mentioned in Chapter 1, Bourdieu (1998) suggests that *précarité* is a ubiquitous and negative condition of modern working life. The implications of such a statement are wide-reaching and it is useful to evaluate it by considering a number of different conceptualisations of 'precarity'. In doing so, I seek to show that, although applicable to employment structures carrying risk and uncertainty (Helfen, 2015:1388; Kalleberg, 2009:2), the meaning of precarity extends beyond them. Specifically, the application of the concept also implies a range of predominantly negative worker experiences, for

instance, on account of the assumed structural determinism on corresponding experiences in Marxist discourses.

A starting point in the investigation of the term's uses in labour market research is Barbier's (2004; see also Doogan, 2015) comprehensive overview. For Barbier (2004), the appropriate rendering of *précarité* from its original French into English is 'precariousness', with 'precarity' being a misnomer. Furthermore, the etymological origins of precariousness point to a much wider application, than the immediate terms of employment. It can be traced back to the construct's Gallic origins and specifically its Latin root, *precor*, meaning 'to pray', or ask for something in prayer. The term 'precarious' is, thus, almost an exact transliteration from the Latin *precarius* and refers to those undertakings and, importantly, experiences which have veiled and uncertain outcomes (Gilliver, 2013). Early applications of the term, therefore, suggest no separation between the context against which a particular precarious experience occurs, and the experience itself. In its original use, therefore, the term applies to both external structures, and experiences of life-events outside of human control and knowledge. Given this consideration, does it mean that using 'precariousness' in the study of labour market is inappropriate, as it goes beyond the context of employment research? Views of labour as part of the human condition (Arendt, 1958), a manifestation of the "essence of man" (Mészáros, 1986:88), able to shape and add meaning to life (Antunes, 2012) suggest that the answer should be 'no'.

Nevertheless, and although gaining wider social connotations in his later work, Bourdieu's use of the term in the early 1960s delimits it to employment contexts, specifically, to comparative studies of permanent versus temporary Algerian workers in France. In the 1970s the term gains political overtones and is associated with

discourses on employment compensations for workers employed on non-standard contracts in French Labour Law.

The next stage in 'precarity' applications sees the establishment of a connection between precarity and poverty, which is made explicit in the 1970s– 1980s period, with investigations focusing on the working poor, and specifically, poverty in family units. Agnes Pitrou's (1978 in French, in Barbier, 2004:9) work on 'precarious families' considers precarity through a range of poverty-related factors including, but not limited to, absence of work skills, precarious working conditions, level of pay, career opportunities, housing conditions and related health outcomes. This framing is comprehensive, taken-up and developed further in contemporary models such as Standing's (2014; 2011), as discussed in Chapter 2.

Two types of precarity conceptualisations are proposed by Paugam (2000 in French, in Barbier, 2004:10). First, it is the relationship to work as a whole, and second, the relationship between the worker and their job. This approach is interesting as its first part appears to utilise, albeit implicitly, Marx's theory of alienation (Mészáros, 1986; Marx, 1981). In Marx, there are four categories of alienation, with the one utilised in Paugam's approach being the separation, or 'estrangement' between worker and work in capitalist societies (Mészáros, 1986). Robert Castel (2000) also recognises the role of work as a determinant of precarity, with the erosion on secure work structures contributing to the loss of social security. Paugam (2000) further distinguishes between the precarity of employment structures (job) and work as an activity, which is a differentiation also present in Standing's (2011) view that particular jobs (low-pay, low-skill, short tenure and so on) can not only result in precarity but lead to the emergence of a precariat. Conceptualisations of precarity, thus, move beyond

applications to the specific context of work and start to become a commentary, as in Bourdieu's (1998) use, on the wider experience of society.

Whether studied in the context of the family, migrant experiences, relationship to work or specific structures of employment, the above approaches share common ground. They all regard participant experiences as inseparable from the corresponding context on which they focus with the resulting experiences, assumed to share a similar, negative quality. Thus, to allow a full range of positive and negative worker experiences of precarity contexts is to also challenge the causal determinism of structures on those experiences. Although such an approach is not common to the study of precarity, grounds for such a distinction can be found in other labour market studies. A distinction between precarious conditions and experiences is present, for example, in Chantal Nicole-Drancourt (1992 in Barbier, 2004:11) and Haas and Wallace's (2004:27) work. Those, however, do not detract from the overall absence of studies which investigate the impact of precarity on workers without recourse to negative experience indicators such as *insecurity* (Standing, 2011; Kalleberg, 2009; Heery and Salmon, 2000); *tenure* (Doogan, 2015; 2013; Robinson, 2000); *redundancy* (Turnbull and Wass, 2000), *stress* (Clarke, et al., 2007; Nolan, et al., 2000). Fevre's (2007) commentary on the complex framing of insecurity experiences could, also, be extended to the construction of precarity. Doing so reminds us that existing discourses are influenced by social theory, rather than presenting an empirical investigation of labour market realities. Doogan (2013) and Shildrick, et al. (2012) align themselves with Fevre's standpoint, and argue that the study of labour market experiences can, thus, become an ideological debate. Therefore, even when the analysis of precarity is circumscribed to the context of labour markets and worker experiences, there is a lack of consensus.

Consequently, my study's aim of understanding the meaning of precarious work through the experiences of precarious workers is not only timely, but also necessary. The qualitative design of my approach, chosen with the intention of providing rich information on the subject matter, appears particularly needful. Given the ambiguity of what precarity work entails as a context of 'atypical', uncertain and/or insecure employment, the choice of one set of statistical measurement over another is likely to portray an incomplete picture. For instance, European studies use part-time work as an indicator pointing to the rise of atypical (precarious) work, yet this does not represent the UK labour market, where part-time work is not-only typical, but one of rising tenure too (Doogan, 2015a).

On the other hand, the approach I take in this thesis is representative of my belief that an important perspective missing from the debate is that of the precarious workers themselves. Therefore, in order to explicitly focus on their experiences, I propose a distinction between the concepts of *precarity* and *precariousness*, applying the former to employment contexts, and reserving the latter for worker experiences of those contexts. Currently, the 'precarity' context is mapped in predominantly structuralist terms, that is, employment opportunities, terms and conditions, tenure and so on. It is also limited to a range of predominantly negative worker experiences, such as uncertainty, insecurity, risk, and so on, which are complex sociological categories themselves. The deterministic relationship, from context to (largely negative) experiences, appears implicit in existing studies, yet I feel that adopting this perspective without sufficient empirical support, would lead to bias. Without rejecting the connection between precarity contexts and precarious experiences, I allow for 'precariousness' to be both positive and negative, and to be moderated by factors outside the objective context of precarious work (see Table 2, Chapter 2).



### *First Manifestation: Precarity as Poverty*

The preceding discussion on different 'precarity' constructions and applications highlights the need to distinguish between objective precarity associated with conditions of employment, and the subjective precariousness of worker experiences. This, then, not only serves as the basis for a specific challenge of the deterministic causality of employment structures upon worker experiences, but also enables the separation of a complex phenomenon into constituent parts and regarding each historical manifestation of precarity. So far, 'precarity' has appeared in negation to 'typical' and 'secure' definitions of work and work-related experience. Thus, I seek to explore the inherent assumptions in each conceptualisation of the term before accepting that a context of precarity makes for an array of insecure experiences (Heery and Salmon, 2000).

Polanyi (2000:109), in particular, traces the causes behind manifestations of precarity as poverty back to the Poor Laws of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The passing and subsequent amendment of the Poor Laws occurred over the 1536-1601 period, and they not only turned the poor, the elderly and those with disabilities into a tax burden but created a homogenous 'social group' (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), which stigma identity (Goffman, 1990), segregated it from the rest of society. For Castel (2000:521), this precarity is perpetuated on account of the vicious cycle of workless-ness in which the poor found themselves. Relationship with work is part of this context, yet its framing also suggests that the corresponding experiences were part of the life-experience as a whole and, thus, went beyond the context of work.

An investigation of the extent to which 17<sup>th</sup> century's poor were able to formulate and rally behind a shared agenda is beyond the scope of this study and, thus, I reserve

judgement on whether the precarious poor constituted a 'class for themselves', conscious of their socio-economic position and shared identity (see, for example, Marx, 1986). They were, nevertheless, recognisable in legal terms and, consequently, distinguishable from other members of society as a 'class in themselves', and an archetype for modern precariat classifications (Standing, 2011). Like Standing's (2011) precariat, the poor were not only in opposition to the State as the body of legislative authority, but in subordination to it. Like the precariat, the precarity of poverty turned the poor into denizens and, in some instances, criminalised them.

The State's involvement in the working and social experiences of its citizens is, however, cyclical, with periods of deregulation followed by periods of re-regulation (see also Kalleberg, 2009; Polanyi, 2001). This suggests that while the State has a role in shaping the context of work, a role recognised in contemporary framings (Standing, 2011:10); this centrality fluctuates in periods of change and does not dominate/determine the employment context permanently. Returning to the period of the Poor Laws offers an example of the fluctuating role of the State, and its shifting involvement in working and social spheres. The Statute of Artificers (1562), for instance, also offered a homogenised treatment of the working population, for instance through the regulation of training, restriction of worker mobility and, thus, leaving no room for worker choice or agency (Woodward, 1980). The role of the State shifted again, and the Speenhamland Act (1795) sought to moderate the level of State involvement in the working sphere. The Act removed collective labour enforcement but was, nevertheless, still a 'one-size-fits-all' provision, causing efficiency, worker attitudes and competitive production to suffer, ultimately entrenching, rather than alleviating worker poverty. Subsequent reforms in 1834, occurring against a backdrop

of industrial change, failed to remove the precarity of poverty, but made the working experience increasingly uncertain and insecure (Polanyi, 2000:83-85; 96).

As a context external to the worker, the precarity of poverty saw the treatment of workers as a homogenous body, required to work whenever and wherever necessary. This context was created by the State's legislative apparatus and, thus, it was against the State as an Other that the precarity of poverty was manifested. Poverty, regrettably, remains a manifestation of precarity with lasting impact even on modern British society (Barnes and Lord, 2013; Lawton and Thompson, 2013). The number of people experiencing poverty at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, furthermore, is the highest ever in British history (Pantazis, et al. (eds.), 2012). At the same time this early, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century symptom of precarity points to the ambiguity in the concept which referred to a plethora of structural circumstances, including but not limited, to State regulations, availability and conditions of work.

This first historical manifestation, of precarity as poverty, has two significant implications for this study. First, it suggest that precarity is not a modern phenomenon and a new concept, and not even one of the recent past but traceable back to the socio-economic context and poverty provisions in 16<sup>th</sup> century Britain. Second, while it can be circumscribed to the working conditions of a particular group, the *experiences* of this group, even in early framings, are not limited to the labour market.

### *Second Manifestation: Precarity as Commodification*

The above discussion prepares the ground for the next conceptualisation of precarity, that of worker commodification. I base this category on the separation between workers and the productive activity of work, one of the aspects of alienation in Mészáros (1986) and Marx (1981). Although the theory of alienation deals with

various aspects of the human condition, I believe this particular category to be directly applicable to a study into the experience of precarious work. Accordingly, I move away from analysing the impact which the absence of jobs, or enforced labour have on the workers, and towards the relationship between workers and work. In capitalist structures, this is the alienation of human beings from their own productive activity. Basing his analysis on Marx's (1981) early work, Mészáros (1986, see also Antunes, 2013) explains that capitalist structures objectify workers, turning them into 'abstract' categories (Lukács, 1983:190). However, the 'labour-power', which the worker sells is *not* an abstract quality, nor a detachable part of their Self. Therefore, in selling it in the labour market, workers also sell themselves and become 'commodities' (Mészáros, 1986:35). Accordingly, I regard the precarity of commodification to occur in opposition to Capital itself. The precarity of commodification is, also, part of the precariat experience in Standing (2011), and was discussed further in Chapter 2.

The process is, nevertheless, complex. For Marx (1981; see also Antunes, 2013), commodification manifests itself only when engagement in work is for a purpose external to the worker, for instance, to pay bills, to buy food, and so on. Work is alienating when it is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, a way to attain individualistic satisfaction outside of work. Participation in paid employment, thus, enables workers to join and participate in society and its activities. As soon as work becomes unavailable, the worker is likely to lose their social footing and, perhaps, move from a position of precarious commodification, back to poverty (Marx, 1981). Recent reports of migrant textile factory workers, who work in conditions of poor health and safety for less than minimum wages (Hoskin, 2015; Hammer, et al. 2015:10) appear to further exemplify Standing's (2011) argument that the precarity of commodification has been resurrected in the precariat.

Marx, however, points out that such commodification is not likely to occur when work is in response to an inner need, and is an activity fulfilling in itself (Marx-Engels Werke in German, in Mészáros, 1986:91). Mészáros (1986) further proposes that work is an activity which mediates the relationship between human beings and Nature. Since humans are conscious beings, they do not act on impulses but, rather, engage with their surroundings through work as a mediator. In this way, labour is the “really human mode of existence” (Mészáros, 1986:78), and the essence of human beings (Mészáros, 1986:88).

However, in her critical reading of Marx, Hannah Arendt (1958) disagrees. For her, the distinction between working in response to an inner need and working in response to an external necessity is found in two separate activities, work and labour, respectively. In distinguishing between work and labour Arendt, in turn, incorporates Locke’s dichotomy of work and labour, referring to the “labour of our body and the work of our hands” (Arendt, 1959:79). This distinction, she continues, is between the creative hands which work to build, and the enslaved body which suffers in its labours. Consequently, labour is an unfinished and continuous process, and opposed to work, which as a finite activity, creating a finished product. Labour, thus, is the activity carried-out in response to necessity, while work is the productive fulfilment of a creative, inner need.

Those accounts move the precarity of commodification construct in two separate directions. For Arendt, labour is an inherently commodifying activity, while in Marxist discourses the distinction between work and labour is not present. Yet, although not commodifying in itself, labour can lead to worker commodification in capitalist contexts. This is so on account of the individualising impact of capitalist systems, which encourages workers to seek individual self-gratification outside of work. Thus, the

precarity of commodification occurs when workers seek to fulfil needs external to them, rather than regard work as an end in itself. Furthermore, individual workers cannot change those structures, since the only way of 'reifying', or modifying them is through joint action. Specifically because the 'praxis' of joint action enables the worker to become conscious of him/herself as a social being and, through collective (and revolutionary) action, change the capitalist context of work (Lukács, 1983). Thus, individualisation is self-perpetuating and causes the precarity of commodification to continually manifest itself in capitalist contexts.

While for Marx the precarity of commodification is caused by the action of capital on labour, for Arendt (1968) commodification is an inherent property of labour as an unceasing and enslaving activity, contrasted to the finite and creative art of work. These considerations, in turn, lead to a number of questions. If labour is 'humanising', a vital activity adding meaning to human life (Antunes, 2013), is its experience qualitatively different from that of work? Should a theoretical distinction between the precarity of labour and the non-precariousness of work be made at this point? Conversely, if the experience of work and labour are similar, though likely to be negative for individual workers, and capitalist societies bring about individualisation, does Standing's (2011) argument for the precariat's distinctiveness as a body of workers with generally negative experiences still hold? Marxist theory, thus, helps to clarify Standing's argument by stipulating that there is scope for worker agency enabling a differentiation of worker experiences away from overarching negativity, but only when workers are part of a collective. Lukács (1983) further adds that there are only two pure collective categories, the proletariat class and the bourgeoisie. Since the precariat are not yet a class, lack class-consciousness and suffer from individualisation they would be likely to have an even more of a subordinate position

than the proletariat. Furthermore, they would also be likely to have particularly negative working experiences, such as insecurity, uncertainty, anxiety, anger and anomie (Standing, 2011:19).

This argument is backed by Marxist theory, yet such a judgement of worker experiences appears overtly deductive, constructed with a high degree of abstraction and then applied to a body of workers, with the voices of the workers themselves barely audible. Antunes (2013) also feels there is scope for differentiation in worker experiences against the apparent determinism of capitalist structures in negative individual experiences. For him, the meaning of individual existence starts to develop with meaningful participation in work (Antunes, 2013:150). In turn, this meaningful participation need not be based on engagement with work, rather than labour, and is possible against capitalist structures. Antunes argues that work's impact on personal experiences is a matter of degree since it (work) is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for personal fulfilment. Thus, when work spreads to take-up all available time a person has, it leads to commodification and ushers in other negative experiences. Conversely, when participation in work makes other activities possible, it can lead to a fulfilling work-life balance and have a positive impact on the person. This view does not address the important matter of personal choice, however. Does it make a difference whether a worker chooses to work long-hours, or whether this choice is imposed on him/her? Equally, does it matter if the worker opts for a reduced number of hours, allowing them a better work-life balance, or if this is imposed on them? A positive answer to either of the above is likely to suggest that the same context can make for both positive and negative experiences. In turn, this leaves scope for other factors which moderate the worker experience and challenge the determinism of the precarious context. This, also, suggests that the experience of precarity is not an

abstract experience, corresponding to a particular context of work but is, rather, relational and can be mediated by factors significant to the person experiencing it.

### *Third Manifestation: Precarity as Flux*

Although both are contexts of precarity, and both occur against an opposing factor, the two manifestations considered above have a different impact on the corresponding worker experience. The emergence of the Poor Laws segregated people with certain characteristics from the rest of society, but also created an 'out-group', collectivising those within it. The manifestation of precarity as commodification is underpinned by competing perspectives, yet in Marxist theory it is regarded as a negative experience, of individualisation, and as a result, commodification. In its particular instance, there is scope for worker agency, but of workers as a proletariat class, and not in individual instances. Antunes' (2013) proposal that work can have a positive impact on the individual, as long as it does not expand to fill all available time, further provides scope for differentiating experiences against the same or similar context of (precarious) work. This possibility begs the question of which factors can mediate the differentiation of personal experience. So far, the Marxist theory response is that only the acquisition of collective consciousness can move the worker experience away from the negative aspects of commodification. The purpose of this section, thus, is to consider whether the individualisation of capitalist structures is inescapable. The collective is of significance in a number of approaches, from Bourdieu's (1998) 'sub-proletariat', Appadurai's (2006) 'economic minority' and Standing's (2011; 2014) precariat. Before investigating the individualising impact of capitalist structures, therefore, I wish to trace the process through which individuals are collectivised and, in turn, understand whether the collective can moderate negative individual experiences in a precarious work context.



For Standing (2011; 2013), the shared participation in low-pay, low-skill and low-tenure precarious work is a sufficient factor for the process of collectivisation of precarious workers to begin. Even though incomplete at the present time, it is also able to cause a range of insecurity experiences, shared by the precariat. Nevertheless, this shared participation in precarious work is not able to endow the precariat with collective consciousness. The absence of a shared, work-based identity also hampers their ability, for now, to reify the context of work, and become a fully-fledged class. Nevertheless, in Mészáros (1983) collective consciousness does not need to be in a *priori* existence for collectivisation to be completed, nor does it prevent workers from becoming a proletariat class. Collective consciousness is 'worked-out' through collective action and, thus, produced gradually. Therefore, its absence alone cannot be cited as a reason precluding the precariat from coming together into a self-conscious class, or acting together in pursuit of a shared cause. How is it possible that, although a collective grouping, the precariat suffers the commodification, alienation and so associated with the individual worker? The answer may be found in Standing's (2011:vii) view of the precariat as a 'class-in-itself'. It is moving towards becoming a class, yet, since the process is incomplete, it currently lacks social consciousness and that is why its members are individually commodified. Such a view is representative of the causal determinism, from context on experience argument, as shaped by the ideology of Marx and Engels (1992).

This line of thought, however, appears to make an implicit assumption. Namely, that the capitalist context of work is able to impact on individual experiences in a constant and consistent fashion, as to always cause individualisation and commodification. Such an assumption, however, is problematic as the context itself is not constant or consistent but, rather, prone to change and punctuated by 'flux' (Polanyi, 2001). The

context of 'flux' is, thus, the third manifestation of precarity and the result of periodical change in labour contexts. Here, precarity is manifested in periods of change, and against laissez-faire market forces, while the State moderates their impact on individuals and is the benevolent institution in the writings of Ferdinand Lasalle, who opposed the views of his contemporary Karl Marx (see, for example, Lasalle, 1884:30).

Once again, the consensus in this category is lacking, making for theoretical ambiguity. For instance, Hayek (2009) does not agree with Polanyi (2001) on the mediating role of the state, through which the precarity of flux experience for its citizens is reduced. He offers a different reading of social developments from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century, where flux is neither a precarious condition, nor requires State moderation/protection of change, but a period of opportunity which empowers the individual. In line with this, 20<sup>th</sup> century attempts to achieve equality and alleviate the level of precarity in societies have the opposite effect with, for instance, socialism resulting in servitude, rather than equality (Hayek, 2009:25-28), lack of individual choice, rather than collective empowerment. For Hayek (2009) and Standing (2011) after him, the Other in opposition to whom precarity occurs, is the State, since its 'one-size-fits-all' approach fails to incorporate the complexity of factors required, in order for personal happiness to be achieved (Hayek, 2001:60).

Alternatively, Polanyi (2001) conceptualises 'flux' as the state in which labour markets and societies find themselves when social organisation is altered, through a move between laissez-faire markets and state paternalism moderating the impact of markets (Polanyi, 2001; Kalleberg, 2009). Flux, therefore, is a cyclical condition occurring in the periods when state mechanisms are reformed in response to change. It is a complex dynamic between State and non-State forces with the latter provoking changes in State legislation but through this only pointing to the lasting significance of

the State apparatus. The precarity of flux, also, begins to shift the scope for decision making in the direction of the worker, as an individual rather than a collective. This, however, leaves scope for uncertainty, since the individual differentiation of worker experiences, in line with personal choice and agency (Hayek, 2009) occurs against forces of supply and demand, and can have a detrimental impact on individual workers. This means that while the collective alone could change its precarious commodification, periods of flux restore the availability of individual options. While those cannot guarantee positive outcomes for the individual worker, such an approach does imply that work-based fulfilment can be achieved away from the collective. In those instances, participation in labour will not, necessarily enable collectivisation, against an opposing force, or an Other, such as capital or, State, nor lead to the formation of a shared identity.

Thus, although contradicting each other on the role of the State in periods of flux, Hayek (2009) and Polanyi's (2001) perspectives provide two particularly important insights. First, periods of flux can challenge contextual determinism on worker experiences and second, those worker experiences in such a precarious context can be both positive and negative. This, for Hayek, is possible as individualisation is inherently beneficial and it provides a wider range of options for individual workers. The argument, therefore, is in favour of individual choice, which for him is to be upheld against the structural determinism of State-led intervention. Individualisation, consequently, is also inherently positive, since the State's bureaucratic apparatus is too rigid to accommodate the richness of individual needs and likely to restrict individual choices. Polanyi (2001) disagrees and posits that, without State intervention, the precarity of flux exposes workers to market pressures. While this can allow for a greater range of variation and options for individuals, it does not guarantee

the individual experience to always be positive. Rather, it can result in inequality, social discontent and other experiences Standing (2011) attributes to the precariat. It, also, leaves open the question of whether workers retain their access to other types of social support which to moderate their experiences during periods of flux. This is an important point, since there the precariat is defined in terms of its opposition to the State and reduced access to State support (Standing, 2015). Therefore, since periods of flux reduce the role of the State, do they further limit the availability of support for the precariat? Given the atomising impact of modernity contexts (Beck, 2000), are precarious workers also prevented from participation in 'social groups' and denied support from them, as well (McGuire, 2007)?

In turn, the importance of social support for the individual finds multi-disciplinary conceptualisation in perspectives across the fields of philosophy (Scruton, 2010) and sociology (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Castells, 2000). Consequently, I consider it in the final precarity manifestation, namely, the precarity of individualisation.

#### *Fourth Manifestation: Precarity as Individualisation*

The preceding conceptualisation, of precarity as flux, raises questions on whether the individualisation of working experiences in capitalist contexts is inevitable and whether its negative Marxist conceptualisation finds universal agreement. As a result of this, it is necessary to consider the final stage of the precarity concept's historic development, and contextualise it against modernity frameworks. Suggesting that precarity can manifest itself in modernity, however, brings the precarity concept close to overlapping with a number of other frameworks, all applicable with the same context and, thus, reduced its utility. This is detrimental in practical, as well as theoretical terms, as it

both detracts from focused application of the precarity term to specific contexts, and removes its ability to provide an original commentary.

One such alternative framework is Beck's (2000; Willms (ed.), 2004) 'Risk Society' which, like conceptualisations of 'precarity', also poses that uncertainty and insecurity have entered the fabric of modern life and are likely to reside there permanently. Furthermore, precarious work can also take place in the context of both natural, and man-made catastrophes. As an example, over 20 Chinese cockle-pickers drowned in the high tides of Morecombe Bay in 2004 (Pollert and Charlwood, 2009; Watts, 2007). In 2010, 13 workers committed suicide at the Foxconn plants in China, exposing the 19<sup>th</sup> century working conditions of low wages and long working hours (Chakraborty, 2013). In October 2014, human error of undertrained and overworked workers caused a detonation in a Bulgarian factory for explosive materials. The detonation was so powerful, that the only means of identifying the casualties was through analysing the DNA of hair-strands, the only human remains left (Tsolova and Nenov, 2014). The precarity of modernity is, thus, not only associated with the risks of job-loss but also injury and the loss of life. In turn, this places precarity further beyond the structures of work and into the fabric of being (Banki, 2013; Neilson and Rossiter, 2005; Butler, 2003). This, once again underscores the ambiguity of the 'precarity' term and challenges the utility of people management approaches, studying it in the narrow context of work.

Beck's (2004) emphasis on interconnectivity between the natural and social, however, is not the first time the 'precarity' construct is applied to a context which goes beyond that of employment. Framing labour as a humanising activity, and one which mediates the relationship between human beings and nature suggests that the two models, of a society threatened by risks, and of society exposed to precarious work, are closer

than initially anticipated. It may also suggest that the context of modernity injects risk not only in the context of work, but in the social and personal sphere. Since the impact of this uncertainty and risk is so extensive, this may lead to the conclusion that modernity regains the structural determinism, from context to experience, which seems challenged in periods of flux. Does this imply that, despite similarities between the contexts of modernity and flux, the former can structure individual experiences? This is implied by Žižek (2012; 2009) and Todorov (2010), who provide a high-level analysis of political and cultural trends in global developments, equating risk with modernity and suggesting it railroads negative experiences, specifically that of fear. Those discourses address wider social experiences, rather than the area of work specifically and highlight the point of model overlap I make at the start of this section.

Amin (2012) and Antunes (2013), however, steer the discussion back towards the precarity of employment issue, and suggest that an important aspect of the external context against which such exclusion occurs is the labour market. While this points to work retaining its significance in the precarity framed as modernity, it appears as one contexts among many, with work vying for the spotlight with social and natural issues in the 'Risk Society' model. Furthermore, the above events show that employment, social and even natural contexts are inter-linked and can influence each other. I regard this as the need to separate context from experience and distinguish between conditions of *precarity* and experiences of *precariousness*. In making this distinction, I acknowledge the similarities between the concepts of 'precarity' and 'risk' when 'precarity' is applied to contexts. Differentiating, and defending the originality of the precarity concept, therefore, rests in its application (as precariousness) to the study of individual precarious work experiences, rather than application as a framework for diagnosing the external context of work.

If this distinction is not made, then applying the 'precarity' concept to the context of modernity only increases the ambiguity of the former. This is so on account of multiple framings of the 'modernity' context, which is alternatively described as 'second' (Willms (ed.), 2004), 'late', or 'high' (Giddens, 1998), along discussions challenging its existence altogether (Doogan, 2013). In this thesis, I do not to engage in the existing debate on whether continuities between the modern epoch and the Industrial age challenge the salience of those framings, considering 'modernity' as a qualitatively different paradigm. It is also beyond the scope of my investigation into experiences of precarious work to comment on comparisons between the Internet, the telegraph and the steam engine as distance-bridging developments of similar impact (Castells, 2000; 2000b). Although of significance for the ontological nature of 'modernity', these contextualise, rather than construct the meaning of precarious experiences while for it is important to adopt the perspective of the 'workers themselves'. Consequently, I apply the term 'modernity' without prejudice, and place it within a conceptual framework which there is a general consensus on. With this in mind, and referring back to earlier conceptualisation, modernity also has its origins in flux. It is a period where traditional forms of economic and social governance are replaced by 'atomised' (Beck, 2000); 'liquid' (Bauman, 2000) but also 'networked' (Castells, 2000) types of organisation. These perspectives, however, fail to agree on whether the individualised context of modernity necessarily gives rise to individualised experiences.

In line with this, two broad approaches on the impact of context can be considered. Giddens (1990:20; see also Tomlinson, 1994:152) suggests that modernity gives rise to 'networked' relationships, where the network could be geographically 'embedded', or not. The 'embedded' network is a locus of interactions taking place in a shared location, between workers and those colleagues in their immediate surroundings. The

'dis-embedded' network encompasses relationships between workers and a wider 'in-group' with which workers are not co-located, or in direct contact but to which they see themselves as belonging. In this sense migrants may be individualised in their place of employment and have no sources of work support, yet associate themselves with an altogether different social unit. This social unit may be the wider network of migrants, whether scattered across the host country and brought together in on-line forums, Facebook groups and so on. It may even be relatives and family members at home.

Having adopted it as a central characteristic of his modernity conceptualisation, Beck's (2000) 'atomisation' discourse approach comes close to Hayek's (2009) in focusing more on structures, than experiences themselves. Beck, defends individualisation on the grounds of its capability to transform the context, which implicitly challenges the commodification discourse which Marxist theory associates with the move from collective to individuals. Accordingly, Beck (2000; 2004, Mythen, 2004) frames modernity as an era of active and 'reflexive' transformation, carried-out by individuals and directed both at themselves, and their environment. Fevre (2000) further argues that individual reflexivity, applied through common sense, acts to transform not only the external socio-economic context, but internally, too, changing ethical and moral categories, too. In other words, it is the action of the individual and no longer only the collective, which can change the socio-economic context. This action is not simply one of 'sense-making', where individuals 'reflect' on their personal experiences. Rather, it can involve the turbulent transformation of social institutions (Beck, 2000), an action which corresponds to change through revolutionary action on Marxist theory (Lukács, 1983). Individualisation, thus, is an outcome which Marx (1986) cautions



against at all times, Polanyi (2001) observes in periods of flux, Hayek (2009) defends and Beck (2000) regards as a source of transformation.

Beck's argument, however, also carries structurally-deterministic overtones and proposes the existence of directional impact, from structures towards experiences. His analysis also appears to hypothesise that this structural determinism also gives rise to a range of negative experiences in the specific context of modernity. For Beck, modernity alters pre-formed social identity categories, such as those shaped by work, family and so on, and turns them into "zombie categories" (Willms (ed.), 2004:6). Like the eponymous antagonists after which they are named, those categories may retain existence as social constructs, but the reality which contextualises them has, since, passed. The transformation of work and other social structures also, conceivably, removes community, work and the family as sources of individual connectivity and identity (Standing, 2011; Kalleberg, 2013), as well as support. These developments, specifically the 'atomisation' of individuals, can, therefore, lead to isolation and preventing them from meaningful and fulfilling participation in a professional and social groups (Willms (ed.), 2004; Verkuyten), whether co-located or 'networked' across a larger geographical area. In line with Hayek (2009), this can also enable a bespoke and individualised employment path which, on one hand removes pre-existing identity categories from individual use but, on the other, allows individuals to 'work' on developing new and personalised social identities (see also Alvesson et al, 2010; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Moreover, this does not have to be an isolated process but can occur in negotiation with familiar groups and cultures (Willms (ed.), 2004:20-32). This appears a reminder of precarity manifestations already considered, and specifically the precarity of flux which moves away from static framing of context, and provides a more flexible and fluid organisation.

This conceptualisation of flux seems carried-over in the manifestation of precarity as modernity and, specifically, Bauman's (2006; 2000) 'liquid modernity' construct which regards fluidity and individualisation as the outcome of fragmenting trade and capital flows. In turn, those flows transform the bureaucratic apparatus of the State, breach national boundaries and challenge State sovereignty. The globalised context of modernity may not have brought about Fukuyama's (1993) 'end of history', but it brings an end to the constraints of location (Giddens, 1998; 1991) and puts an end to geography (Bauman, 1998).

Bauman (2000) brings those analytical strands together by proposing that along with increasing opportunity, fluid and flexible socio-economic organisation make self-identification increasingly difficult, and the presence of identities more important. As a starting point it, identification is challenged by the demise of traditional identity categories (Beck, 2000) and the increased contact and experience of Others, differing on cultural, ethnic, economic and even ethical grounds (Žižek, 2009; Fevre, 2000; Huntington, 1996). The deterministic impact of context on experience is ambiguous, and while it does not preclude participation in social units, it seems that modernity fails to provide social precedents and identity categories, through which to 'sense-make' those experiences. It also paves the way for social conflict, by stratifying human circumstances, skills and approaches and promoting competition over co-operation. One of the impacts this has on the experience of precarity in the socio-economic context of work, therefore, is to increase the importance of connectivity to networks, both 'embodied' and 'dis-embodied', and worker ability to move along, supplying those skills which are in demand (Castells, 2000).

The structure and organisation of interaction is, thus, the ontological difference between modernity, and preceding manifestations of precarity. For Castells (2000)

socio-economic interaction, furthermore, supersedes the moderating role of the State, on account of the spread of ICT, which make modernity a qualitatively-different paradigm. Appadurai (2006) supports this analysis and refers to this new type of organisation as being 'cell-like' and, thus, differentiated from the 'vertebrae' hierarchy of State bureaucracies. For Castells (2000) the advent of modernity has the potential to bring-about greater network inter-dependence on a global scale. In turn, it is enabled by the emergence of "informational capitalism", which revolutionises output since it does not utilise the labour-power circumscribed in individual workers, but knowledge. Furthermore, while capitalist systems re-produce labour subordination which, in Marxist theory, leads to commodification and individualisation, here knowledge reproduces knowledge (Castells, 2000:17-19). This begs the question of access to this knowledge, and the ability to use it through a suitable skill-set in an employment context. Castells' argument, in other words, could be taken to its logical conclusion by suggesting that while the use of knowledge leads to new knowledge, rather than subordination, in the "informational capitalism" of modernity, reduced access to this knowledge may bring about subordination.

This line of reasoning, combined with the earlier discussion on the centrality of networked organisation in a modernity context, replaces the issue of State determinism or, rather, connects the State and turns it into another node on the extended, socio-economic network. It also raises the issue of whether connectivity to the 'network', as short-hand for a variety of groupings, co-located, dispersed, mad-up of social agents, legal and political institutions can become a source of information, personal and professional identity. Placed between collectivisation and individual atomisation, networks can re-forge community links, integrate individuals and bridge the isolation of location in virtual reality, without making the resulting experience any

less real (Castells, 2000:127; 389). Without this network grounding, Young (2007) argues, over-exposure to choice, options and competition could lead individuals to a 'vertigo' of uncertainty, insecurity and anxiety. Experiences, which, for Standing (2011), are typical of the precariat, whose network participation (in terms of having access to representation, legal protection and being integrated in the work-place) is reduced. Displacement from paid work, training, colleague support and professional representation, thus, leads the precariat to a sense of isolation, anomie and identity-loss, with little scope for escaping their precarious context by moving along the employment network, or change it through collectivised, class action.

Thus, the 'network', itself an ambiguous concept which encompasses social, economic, legal and political relationships, between humans as well as organisations is a unique type of organisation made possible by the advent of modernity and its ICT technologies. Given its significance, on account of the network's ability to support social groupings, accommodate individual choices and provide sources of identity, it appears as an important moderator of precarious experiences. If so, it is important to consider the individual-network dynamic, which enables access to work, pay, training and representation. Specifically, whether there are any other factors, apart from those in the employment supply-and-demand range, which need to be taken into account in order to understand the process of individual-network integration. Thus, lack of integration may be caused by a perceived lack of shared characteristics such as professional skills, education and so on, suggesting that once in place, network isolation is self-perpetuating. This is so, since identity formation in a network context includes the assimilation of familiar symbols and meanings, with the parallel filtering out of those which are different (Castells, 2000:22). This is a process which seems to occur along the lines of self-categorisation into a 'social group' and inter-group contact

(Turner, 1991; Miller and Brewer, 1984). Without access to employment (and before them, educational) networks, there can be no acquisition of skills and qualifications, which, in turn, results in network disconnect and preclusion from participation, as well as reduced willingness for future participation (Verkuyten, 2014). This is where the significance of network membership and instances of its lack as in Standing's (2011) precariat, manifest themselves. In the latter case, network disconnect can produce 'deviants' (Bauman, 2000) and 'denizens' (Standing, 2011), preventing both access to pre-formed professional identities, and the acquisition of skills/support scope for developing new ones. The network, thus, places individuals at the centre of a milieu of relationships, in the context of 'networked individualism' (Castells, 2000:23; Bell, 2007:67-68). Despite presenting an apparent paradox, the term refers to the network context enabling the construction of social groupings around individual needs and preferences, through which participants can reconstruct their identities in line with personal preference, from a range of available options (provided by the network). Participation in the network, therefore, provides options, enables personal freedom as defended by Hayek's (2009), while being able to moderate the determinism of precarious contexts.

Such a framing creates a fluid relationship between the network and the individual, with Castells (2000) recognising the reconstructive impact of network membership in the resultant blurring between personal and collective identities. Given the multiple complex dynamics proposed in the above discussion the question of the relationship between the network and individual may be seen to arise. Further to this, is Castells' (2000) network related to SIT framings of the 'social group' as moderators of the individualising aspect of modernity? The dynamic between the 'social group' and individual precarious workers is explored in Chapter 4, yet it is useful to remind of

Haslam's (2001) discussion of abstract 'social groups'. Membership in 'social groups' can enable the development of 'social identities' and while there is an inherent separation between the personal and social components of those social identities (Deschamps and Devos, 1998), both elements are necessarily present (Tajfel, 1974). At the same time, personal identities are based on the difference between the Self and others, while social identities are forged on similarities between the Self and others and are derived from membership in a 'social group' (Sanchez-Mazas and Klein, 2003). 'Social groups' can bring together individuals on account of their similarities in a continuously formative process, which can extend individual identities into the shared social identity of a 'social group'. As per the discussion in Haslam's (2001) and Knight and Haslam (2010) 'coming together' of individuals can occur on varying levels of abstraction and not refer to co-located persons alone. Since this abstraction can be low and apply to a group colleagues as well as an imagined 'whole' of workers in a company, it does not imply uniform levels of cohesion, not class-consciousness. Thus, basing my analysis on the dispersal and flexibility of network organisation (Bell, 2007:68), I regard networks as the ICT-mediated contexts against which abstract 'social groups', for instance, of same-country nationals living in different countries can form. Alternatively, networks can also provide the context against which inter-group contact (Miller and Brewer, 1984), for instance, between workers at one site and those at another, can occur. Even network contact between geographically-dispersed groups can, thus, make workers aware of the existence of different 'out-groups', and prompt them to categorise themselves into the 'in-group' of their colleagues (see also Ashforth and Mael, 1989). In turn, such categorization can cause the person to evaluate his or her 'social group' in positive terms, minimising 'in-group' differences and maximising those between the 'in-group' and 'out-groups' (Hogg, 1992:90-95).

This may impact on the person's behaviours, attitudes, blurring personal-group boundaries (Harré, 1978). Consequently, it may lead the worker to evaluate his or her precarious group in positive terms and be less perturbed by the stigma allocated to it by members of 'out-groups'. These considerations are significant for my study into precarious experiences, as they contest the precarity of individualisation argument, by pointing to the existence of ICT-enabled network organisation of modern socio-economic context. In turn, those networks can prompt and facilitate individual participation into 'social groups' through which workers could re-construct the deterministic impact of precarity contexts.

The precarity of modernity, thus, can lead to individualisation but, at the same time, enable the individual to participate in the context of precarious work as part of a 'social group', connected to an overarching network. The onus for joining it is placed on the individual and membership is not guaranteed, and disconnect can be isolating. Modernity context framings, nevertheless, reclaim the right and ability of individuals to pursue their own career path and construct their own experiences. The outcome for individuals do not have to be always positive, yet neither do they have to be always negative, as prescribed by Marxist discourses. In Marxist theory, individualisation is seen as the pursuit of individual gratification away from the collective, and leads to the commodification and subordination of workers. Individualisation is, also, a path to self-destruction causing workers to replace work with pleasure, choose inactivity and, eventually, alienate themselves from society in particular, and humanity in general (Mészáros, 1986:111; 262). In modernity frameworks, however, individualisation does not have to be either alienating or isolating and can entail active participation in socio-economic networks. This, in turn, provides an insight in how participation in 'social

groups', themselves situated in over-arching networks, can impact on precarious experiences.

The context of modernity is shared by precariat and non-precariat workers alike, however, as previously solid and collectivised structures of social and economic organisation are 'liquefied' and 'atomised'. Precariousness, therefore, can be a negative experience in instances of work and social group disconnect, but the dynamic remains complex, with negative experiences also possible in instances of network connectivity and 'social group' participation. In other words, network membership does not guarantee equality of social footing or equal access to market participation, perhaps even less so in the instance of the precariat. Appadurai (2006) expands on this by viewing modernity not as an abstract set of phenomena, occurring on a plane beyond that populated by individuals and States, but a process with a tangible impact on structures and lives. As such, the impact is uneven and unequal, resulting in economic 'minorities' and 'majorities'. This dichotomy does not mean that the corresponding experiences are of polar opposition and, while the former struggle on account of their reduced access to wealth distribution, the latter fear change and slipping into the precarious strata, as a result of this change. The network, thus, provides access to employment, but not on equal, or fair terms. Consequently, the manifestation of precarity as modernity has an impact which ambiguously extends beyond individuals and groups. Nevertheless, the experience of those 'economic minorities' within it, a framework which comes close to Standing's (2011) precariat, is hypothesised to be one of disconnect and, as a result, generally negative and one of anger, alienation and anxiety. These types of experiences may seem to go beyond the sheer context of work and come across as complex social, economic, psychological and even existential categories (Neilson and Rossier, 2005). This is,



perhaps, unsurprising, given the ambiguity of the original concept which, for Butler (2003) can be studied in the context of human existence.

While I do not reject the possibility of negative worker experiences in precarious contexts, the assumptions of negative experiences against an objective set of conditions (reduced access to work, tenure, training and representation) appears reductionist. This is especially so, given the scope for 'networked individualisation' and 'individual reflexivity' as source not only of personal sense-making but even context transformation (presumably in the context of the flexible network, which can be re-structured around the individual).

Rather than circumscribing precariousness to experiences, attitudes, views and perspectives, that is, the 'intending' of precarious work, the framing of precarity through the four manifestations above has to make use of external frameworks. Rather than constructing its meaning around observed relationship, it places the 'precarity-precariousness' relationship into an existing mold of negative dynamics. Fitting 'precariousness' into existing concepts, whether of poverty, alienation, flux or individualisation, therefore, also introduces additional layers of theoretical complexity, and injects ideology (whether explicit or implicit) into the framing. As a result, the meaning of precarious work ceases to reflect the precarity of current working conditions and becomes a discourse, inferred from social theory and the history of industrial relations. In addition, the advent of modernity parts with historical continuities, lifting workers from their traditional support-structures and placing them in a much more flexible, indeed, 'liquid' network. The network comprises a wide plethora of relationships between different types of agents and, thus, the concept of the 'in-group' presents a focused way of studying one set of experiences, those of the precariat.

## *Summary*

This chapter offered a high-level conceptualisation of precarity, aimed at its framing as a historic, rather than new; and relational, rather than stand-alone experience. This is demonstrated through a brief overview of the contexts, from historic to modern, in which precarity can manifest itself.

Following a discussion of four successive manifestations, precarity emerges as a complex construct. Originally developed as a description of French labour market realities, it has taken on a range of additional meanings, and has become a diagnosis of the modern human condition, rather than merely a commentary of labour markets trends. Thus, while in the proceeding, Chapter 2 discussion I accepted the existence of a set of precarious work criteria, here I showed that in its historic application the conceptualisation of 'precarity' extends beyond the sphere of low-pay, low-skill work. This complexity leads me to challenge discourses viewing precarity as a predominantly negative experience. Specifically, I reject the proposed structural determinism, according to which low-skill, low-pay context effect negative worker experiences. The overview of historical conceptualisation of the precarity term suggest that such determinism presents an ideological discourse, with a set of inherent assumptions, for instance, about the position of workers in capitalist contexts, and is not representative of actual worker experiences in a specific, and objective labour market contexts. Furthermore, by discussing structurally-deterministic discourses it was possible to uncover the complex inherent assumptions behind each framing, which collectively contributed to the overall ambiguity of the 'precarity' term.

In considering the precarity of poverty, for instance, I pointed-out the significance not just of the economic context of the era, but the framework of legal provisions for

enforced labour, which created stigmatised 'out-groups' and could lead to personal experience of risk and harm. The context could influence personal experiences, yet this influence was neither uniform nor constant, but prone to change in line with changing legislation. The precarity of commodification was also a complex experience, not only due to the intricate labour-capital dynamic in developed capitalist societies but also in terms of the significance of collective identity in Marxist discourses. Once again, the capitalist context was deemed to effect negative personal experiences but with the tacit premise that capitalism was always individualising, while individuality and lack of collective organisation always led to commodification.

The incidence of flux in the context of change highlighted contrasting views on the role of the State as a regulator of the economic context. Although regarded as a benevolent moderator by Polanyi (2000), this view of the State is contested by Hayek (2009) who posits that State involvement limits the scope for choice and individuality. Contrary to Marxist perspectives, the latter is not presented in overtly negative overtones, despite that lack of certainty that individualisation always leads to individually-beneficial outcomes. Nevertheless, the precarity of flux conceptualisation underscored two important weaknesses in ideological framings of precarity. First, that the argument for uniformly negative impact of capitalist contexts on worker experiences is invalid, since the contexts themselves are not uniform but prone to change. Periods of flux were examples of just such change where the context changed without the need for revolutionary, collective action. Second, that while individualisation could not guarantee the fulfilment of individual needs and goals, it needed not always lead to negative experiences either. Individualisation, furthermore, did not have to mean the isolation and, indeed, the Marxist alienation of workers from

society or themselves. Rather, the scope for social support, albeit at a 'social group', rather than class level, could be retained.

Individuality and choice were, thus, made possible through the advent of ICT-mediated modernity, which could enable 'social group' membership. In this context positive precarious experiences appeared contingent on worker ability to remain connected to socio-economic networks, without falling-off and becoming an 'economic minority'. The 'social group' concept appears to offer particular utility in studying the scope for workers to re-construct the negative impact of precarity contexts and is considered in greater detail in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4: FROM A SINGLE PRECARIAT TO MULTIPLE 'SOCIAL GROUPS'

Following the analysis of complex precarity manifestations and proposed distinction between contexts and experiences, the purpose of this chapter is to consider whether the structural determinism of the former on latter can be moderated. Through the use of SIT frameworks I, specifically, investigate the theoretical possibility of precarious workers re-constructing the negative impact of precarious contexts on their experiences through membership in 'social groups'. In doing so, I encounter the alternative argument for the precariat's collectivisation into a 'class-like' unit, whose shared subordination not only brings about alienation and insecurity, but makes them 'dangerous' (Standing, 2011).

I begin Chapter 4 by applying Cohen's (1980) three-lens approach to both review evidence for precariat cohesion, and determine whether a precariat subculture, as an indicator of tension between dominant and subordinate social groups in society, is in existence.

Finding little evidence for a cohesive, precariat sub-culture, I challenge references to the precariat as a 'class-like' (Standing, 2011) unit. This leads me to propose my own framing of the precariat, as distinctive 'social groups', through which workers are able to 'negotiate' the phenomenological 'intending' of precarious contexts (Trepte, 2012).

In the latter stages of the chapter I discuss the implications of re-defining the precariat as comprised of distinctive, but not collectivised 'social groups'. Specifically, I use SIT frameworks to theorise about the experiences of precarious workers within the group, as well as their scope for moderating the negative impact of precarity context through recourse to 'social identities'.

### *Challenging the Precariat's Cohesion*

Guy Standing views the precariat's participation in labour markets as a generally insecure experience, and one leading to precariat members' "anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation" (Standing, 2011:19). Standing (2014) recognises variations in the precariat experiences, yet his analysis suggests those are not sufficiently significant as to change the collective insecurity of precarious workers. This, in turn, leads him to view the precariat as a 'class-like' unit, not only on account of the sharing of negative experiences, but through the shared subordination to the State (Standing, 2015). This is why the precariat is a 'class-in-the-making' which, although not self-aware at the present moment, is on its way of developing class-consciousness and becoming a 'class-for-itself' (Standing, 2011:155). The assumed 'class-like' status of the precariat is significant, as it has implications not only for workers' ability to re-construct their individual precariousness, but also for their likelihood to collectively resist their subordination. It is, thus, necessary to assess Standing's (2011) proposal from a number of perspectives before adopting it, and applying it in my own analysis.

The discussion in Chapter 3 showed conflicting evidence on the impact which historical manifestations of precarity have. In line with this, the 'precarity of poverty' and 'precarity of commodification' appear to affect certain groups more than others and can be viewed as having a collectivising impact. However, the 'precarity of flux' and 'precarity of individualisation' seem to leave scope for individual differentiation and retain the capacity for worker agency within each respective context. In response to the ambiguity of those conceptualisations, I deploy an alternative theoretical lens. Specifically, I seek to determine whether the proposed collectivisation of precariat workers into a class is accompanied, or supported by the parallel development of a precariat sub-culture. If in existence, it could give credence to the view that the sharing

of negative experiences, be they of work, State policy, media portrayals, and so, are causing the emergence of subversive cultural behaviours aimed at challenging the precariat's current position (Cohen, 1980). In this sense, such behaviours could be used by precariat groups as one of the weapons in their "delinquency" arsenal to address a "structurally-imposed problem" (Cohen, 1980:iv) of work and specifically, working conditions. Furthermore, if evidenced, this capacity for joint behaviour could point to the existence of collective precariat consciousness and a move towards a class 'for itself' in Marxist theory conceptualisations (Standing, 2011, see also Marx, 1847). Conversely, modernity contexts may offer scope for individual choice and agency (Beck, 2000; Giddens, 1998). In this case, even in the absence of collectivisation, the 'social group' can enable precarious workers to re-construct their experiences and identities. If so, it would be necessary to consider whether precarious workers can participate in 'social groups', or, whether the associated stigma prevents them from forming meaningful and sustainable 'social identities.

In line with this, Cohen (1980:v) uses three analytical lenses to explore the dynamic between mainstream social groups and subordinate ones, which I apply to existing conceptualisations of the precariat as follows.

First, the 'structural' context lens refers to the external social environment which individuals inhabit and against which their experiences occur, but without being able to exert direct control over or change it. In line with Standing's (2014; 2011) argument, the 'structural' context of low-pay, low-skill work is exerting a collectivising impact on those in it, evident in what he proposes to be a range of negative experiences. The precariat are a 'class-in-the-making' but without having yet formed collective consciousness (Standing, 2011), thus, unable to organise under a collective goal. This, therefore, prevents them from 'reifying' their surroundings the way the proletariat

were encouraged to (Marx and Engels, 1992; Mészáros, 1986; Lukács, 1983). Since this is the case in Standing (2014; 2011), his analysis appears to point to the existence of tension between the precariat and society at large, at least, at the ‘structural’ context level of Cohen’s (1980) analysis. At the same time, as I argued in Chapter 3, the concept of ‘precarity’ can be framed in a number of ways, each of which carries a number of inherent assumptions about the possibility of negative experiences. Thus, in aligning himself with Marxist theory, a discourse of overarching worker subordination and commodification, Standing (2011) assumes that the precariat’s working context places them in opposition to other working groups and the State.

Second, the ‘symbolic’ lens references the existence of ‘outlets’ through which the subordinate group can challenge the constraining context and the mainstream group’s domination. Cohen (1980) refers to those ‘outlets’ as different types of ‘sub-cultures’ through which, for instance, the precariat could create their own narratives and produce their own history. An example of this, therefore, would be a subversive precariat ‘sub-culture’ movement, such as the Mods and Rockers studied by Cohen (1980). The positioning of such a subversive culture against dominant cultures is, in turn, likely to result in conflict on a number of levels. In line with this, discourses referring to the move-away from stable work to flexible employment; from security to precarity, from social support to social atomisation may be deemed just such examples of social conflict (Castells, 2000; Appadurai, 2006; Bauman, 2006). In Cohen’s (1980) analysis, the conflict is brought to the ‘system’ by subordinate and vulnerable groups using ‘partisan’ tactics to combat marginalisation by dominant ‘structures’. Examples include school absenteeism, rejection of work-ethics and subsequent refusal to obtain an education or gain working experience. Ironically, such behaviour only serves to self-perpetuate subordination, since by failing to gain working experience, acquire a



qualification or adopt a strong, working ethic subordinate groups are unable to move out of their present circumstances.

The application of Cohen's (1980) analysis to the precariat would suggest that they should, also, reject and rebel against dominant practices and mainstream culture. Standing's (2011) reference to the precariat as a potentially 'dangerous class' foresees just such developments and calls for their prevention through the creation of social policies that could endow the precariat with mobility away from its current condition (Standing, 2014). Nevertheless, at the present time, the precariat are willing to participate in work and adopt a strong working ethic (Shildrick et al., 2012). Furthermore, it is the precariat's willingness but limited access to training, development, progression and so on (Standing, (2011, see also Table 2, Chapter 2) which contributes to their insecurity. This suggests that the precariat's internal cohesion is not such, as to produce 'sub-cultural' outlets through which to challenge the dominant group. Even more, rather than challenging the dominant Other, which for Standing (2015) is the State, the precariat are seeking to engage with employment structures, in order to retain their position within employment networks

Third, the application of the 'biography' analytical lens to the precariat comprises the narratives through which workers' experiences of structures, and cultural responses, are interpreted. Thus, if precariat members collectively interpret the context of low-pay, low-skill work as restrictive and commodifying, this may lead to the already discussed attempt to redefine their 'biographies' by conflict and resistance.

In Marxist discourses this resistance can only be effective when carried-out collectively (Mészáros, 1986). Portuguese demonstrations, the *indignados* movement against high unemployment levels, as well as Euro MayDay parades discussed in Chapter 2

can be viewed as just such efforts to re-write collective 'biographies'. These can also be regarded as evidence of discontent with current 'structures', where employers retain the security in 'flexicurity', leaving the need for flexibility with workers (Mattoni, 2012; Standing, 2011).

Can this serve as evidence of a budding precariat sub-culture which, in turn, indicates consciousness of a subordinate position and a refusal to accept it? A closer analysis of the matter raises a number of questions. Given manifestations of precarity as modernity, could the above instances be seen as specific and narrow precariat experiences, or are they the wider experiences of all societies, regardless of individual position in the labour market? Furthermore, could these be isolated and separate responses to very specific political and social contexts, rather than collective behaviour in line with an overarching identity? Returning to conceptualisation of modernity as a context of insecurity, uncertainty and risk, suggests that indiscriminate application of the 'precarity' concept can be problematic. Doing so can, at best, cause the researcher to miss the social, economic and political nuances of the context and, at worst, to lose focus and move into a related, but separate conceptual framework altogether. Applying 'precarity' to the analysis of a wide range of settings, from low-pay and low-skill work to socio-economic movements for change can, thus, lead to generic conclusions (see, for example, Todorov, 2010; Huntington, 1996). While able to comment on the ontological nature of modernity, those conclusions are unable to shed light on the experiences of individual workers in precarious work.

The application of Cohen's (1980) three lens framework, thus, is unable to provide definitive evidence for the existence of intra-precariat cohesion. Taken together with the ambiguity of precarity manifestations over time, this makes the argument for collective precariat insecurity more of an ideological assertion, rather than empirical

assessment. At the same time, this absence of a subversive precariat sub-culture is not sufficient to avoid the external attachment of a stigma identity. Neither does it prevent 'moral panic' social responses as the ones proposed by Cohen (1980), with the media reporting a number of 'dramatic events' in order to stir a sense of 'public disquiet'. Ironically, despite Standing's (2011) warnings that the precariat are not, and ought not to be regarded collectively as a criminalised underclass, his analysis inadvertently adds to the precariat 'moral panic' by depicting their trajectory as culminating in social discontent and conflict. A case in point is interest in zero-hour contracts and their use as part of 'flexploitation' discourses of precarious workers as 'victims' and wider social concerns regarding migrants, benefit-cheats, unemployed as the 'Others' who exploit and threaten the lifestyles of regular citizens (Murray, 2015; Sanders, 2013)

The resultant 'moral enterprise' aims at imposing a 'culture of control', which anticipates socially unacceptable behaviour, and having already 'sensitized' public opinion, frames it symbolically, as such (Cohen, 1980). A range of examples could be identified in, for instance, the pre-election popularity of the UKIP's (UK Independence Party) stand on curbing immigration (BBC, 2014) as well as Republican US Presidential Candidate Donald Trump's comments on the "problem" of Muslims (Matharu, 2015). In the absence of a 'flagship' precariat group which could be identified and accorded 'folk devil' status, working immigrants and unemployed people on benefits appear as media proxies, having their position in public opinion shaped by the media and, as a result, being stigmatised and disconnected from socio-economic 'networks' (Cohen, 1980:xxiv; p.77). Public views have been influenced by a number of television programmes offering a 'fly-on-the-wall' look at the lives of denizens, whether people on benefits, migrants or the unemployed (Channel 4's *Benefits Street*

and *Britain's Benefit Tenants*; Chanel 5's *On Benefits & Proud* and *Benefits Britain: Life On The Dole*). Those seem to support Cohen's (1980:xxviii) comments on the "final irony" suffered by subordinate groups who are not only in a difficult position but are being "patronized" about it. Such media tactics do, however, offer evidence for precariat groups being segregated from the rest of society through the use of stigmatisation tactics and discourses. Although this creates the existence of 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' and perhaps points to conflict, it is not initiated by the precariat as an 'in-group' but suffered by them as an 'out-group'. If so, examples of conflict fail to demonstrate sufficient cohesion and solidarity by precariat members, to an actual or symbolic precariat class.

Consequently, it could be argued that the apparent absence of a reactionary sub-culture response by precariat groups distinguish them from Mod and Rocker groups in a very significant way. While the latter sought differentiation through rejection, the precariat could be viewed as seeking integration through acceptance. This was exemplified in the *Benefits Street* debate hosted by Channel 4, which tried to pit the benefits cast of the programme against a diverse audience, given the strong social media criticism, at times escalating to death threats, which the programme had elicited (Jefferies and Sommerlad, 2014). During the debate, however, 'White Dee' (one of the benefit recipients which the programme featured) spoke of being distraught with the negative portrayals and views of her and the community. Moreover, she felt that the programme producers had misrepresented their close-knit community which pulled together in the face of adversity. The cast, moreover, sought to underscore their efforts to find work both in order to contribute to society and to set the right example to family members. Such behaviours does not seem to fit into Cohen's (1980) description of sub-cultural subversion of mainstream structures and, through its

challenge of precariat 'for-itself' class consciousness, calls into question for its cohesion and solidarity, also.

### *Challenging the Precariat's 'Class-like' Status*

The complexities of the arguments above have further implications for my study since they call into question a central assumption of Standing's (2011) precariat framing. Specifically, it suggests that while the precariat could be collectively classified under the banner of low-skill, low-pay work, yet, defining it as a 'class-like' collective appears increasingly problematic. Standing's (2015) additional premise that the precariat is a 'class-in-the-making' on account to being placed in opposition to the legislative and political apparatus of the State, also fails to account for the lack of intra-precariat cohesion. Diversity within the precariat group which application of Cohen's (1980) analytical model suggests, coupled with Standing's (2011) assertion that the precariat lack a meaningful identity makes its 'class-like' status problematic on two counts.

First, the absence of precariat cohesion suggest that its members are not likely to see themselves as being equally opposed to State and labour market structures. In turn, this can conceivably preclude them from opposing those structures through organised collective action.

Second, the absence of a meaningful identity can preclude the precariat from uniting under a shared agenda, or even agree on a common goal. Rather than coming ever closer together, Standing's (2013) 'atavists', 'nostalgics' and 'progressives' are likely to have divergent goals and expectations of their common, low-skill, low-pay context. In turn, this is also likely to prevent them from collective action which is significant in the Marxist discourse of Mészáros (1986), since it is only through collective action that

a 'class-in-itself' can acquire collective consciousness and become a 'class-for-itself'. Prominent Marxist Philosopher György Lukács (1983) further argues that class-consciousness cannot be caused to emerge, for instance, by the opposition of a precariat to the State which Standing (2011) proposes. Rather, it is produced in the course of rational collective action in opposition to the position in the process of production which a certain group finds itself. Although referencing the proletariat, this reasoning can be applied to the precariat, which Standing (2014; 2011) constructs by recourse to Marxist theory, also. In the preceding section I argued that there is inconclusive evidence that the precariat are currently challenging, or even interested in challenging, what Standing (2011) argues is a subordinate position, circumscribed to low-skill, low-pay work. A final, related point is that of representative political institution, which Lukács (1983) regards as the bearer of class-consciousness. By Standing's (2011) definition, the interests of the precariat are not represented by mainstream political parties, yet could this be due to the absence of common precariat interests and not an indicator of political oversight?

### *Precarious 'Social Groups' and Their 'Social Identities'*

While such an argument is poised to challenge Standing's (2011) classification for the precariat in collective terms, it does seem to leave open the matter of a meaningful, work-based precariat identity. The two points are connected, since for Standing (2011), the precariat's current inability to develop as a self-aware class is due to absence of a meaningful and unifying work-based identity. This, in turn, leads to the precariat's diminished social status, which although not quite deviant and criminalised, is 'truncated' (Standing, 2011:8). This has a significant implication, as it seems to support Standing's (2014; 2011) assertion that the experiences of the precariat are necessarily insecure. If low-skill, low-pay jobs are unable to provide members of the

precariat with a meaningful, in the sense of personally fulfilling and socially-recognised professional identity, then the corresponding experience is likely to be negative, regardless of whether the precariat is 'class-like', or not. Verkuyten (2014), in turn, states that when membership to a group leads to negative experiences, and Standing (2011) argues that the precariat's 'truncated' identity does just that, this could reduce individual willingness to stay and even join 'social groups'. Not only is precariousness, thus, a negative experience but potentially a self-perpetuating one and even if this is not enough to unite the precariat into a class, it resurrects the structural determinism of context on experiences discourse.

This is not a conclusion which should be reached lightly, and not without evaluating the premises leading to it. The preceding discussion does challenge the conditions for the development of collective precariat consciousness, yet this does not also imply that members of the precariat are precluded from participating in 'social groups'. Neither does it suggest that they are unable to internalise the social identity of the 'social group' (Hogg, 1992; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Tajfel and Turner, 1979) or benefit from the social support of co-members (McGuire, 2007). If such theorisations prove plausible, then this could challenge the structural determinism argument on the grounds of 'social identities' enabling workers to moderate their experiences of the context. This would also present Standing's (2011) argument of low-pay, low-skill work preventing the formation of meaningful 'social identities', as too reductive an explanation, and one failing to acknowledge the complex process of identity construction.

Thus, the processes may be described with reference to a person's self-concept, which Standing (2011) inherently makes reference to, when describing precarious work as carrying social stigma and leading to a 'truncated' identity and social status.

Conceivably, for Standing (2011) precarious work is unfulfilling as, ultimately, it does not enable the formation of a meaningful self-concept. For Ashforth and Mael (1989), however, the self-concept is a complex construction because its formation draws on multiple sources. Those could be personal attributes such as ethnographic attributes, skills and abilities, as well as classification in terms of membership to social groups. Tajfel and Turner (1979) clarify that this suggests individual proclivity for two types of behaviour, 'interpersonal' and 'intergroup', broadly referring to the difference between acting in line with personal and group interests, respectively. Thus, while sharing a working context with others may enable a precarious worker to self-categorise into a 'social group', this is by no means a deterministic process, nor is the individual without scope for agency. The classification of the self with regards to others is, therefore, relational and with regards to a number of other groups. If membership to a particular group ceases to be meaningful or fulfilling, the worker can distance themselves from this particular social group. In any case, in order for self-categorisation into a 'social group' to occur, a number of conditions need to be present with ease of entry, group cohesiveness, acceptance by the group being among them. Importantly, the group needs also appear attractive to the worker about to join it (Hogg, 1992: 3-5). This is so, because the 'social group', consisting of individuals perceiving themselves as members to the same category with the potential of becoming emotionally-invested in it, is also source of meanings for its members (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Unlike 'crowds' social groups do not lead to a sense of 'deindividualisation' for its members, nor provide a means of anonymity where the sense of personal and even social responsibility is lost (Hogg, 1992:12-15; Diener, et al., 1980). The 'social group' can offer recourse to group behaviour, where group norms and values take precedence over personal ones (Deux and Burke, 2010; Tajfe and Turner, 1979).



Neither is the 'social group' necessarily as large as a 'community' which can be defined as offering its members a common territory or geography, with the array of religious values, or recognised standards of professional practice (such as, for instance, those provided by the CIPD and the Chartered Management Institute). In this sense, precarious 'social groups' may not occupy the types of roles or practice the skills which can offer entry to professional communities of practice. This, however, does not mean that they cannot achieve a sense of belonging to a 'social group' which, despite not being the same as a professional community of practice, is meaningful nonetheless (Haslam, 2001; Hogg, 1992).

Even though workers are able to self-categorise in 'social groups' at varying degrees of abstraction ranging from, for instance, their co-located colleagues, to a wider group of immigrants or even nationals from the same country, this does not imply a loss of self (Knight and Haslam, 2010; Haslam, 2001). Rather, it suggests that workers are able to share in an existing 'social group' identity as a means through which to develop their self-concept (Sanchez-Mazas and Klein, 2003). In turn, this enables workers to combat the uncertainty of trying to discover their position in an employment and social context by self-categorising into and adopting the values of pre-existing social categories. This, however, is not a process which occurs in isolation whereby a person's working identity governs their whole 'social identity' or determines their self-concept. The existence of a 'social identity' requires a means of contrast and an 'out-group' with regards to which the membership to the 'in-group' can be defined (Klein, et al., 2007). This is reminiscent of Standing's (2015) argument that the precariat are 'class-like' status is defined in opposition to State and, thus, serves to re-draw the lines of his framing by changing the focus. Thus, while the presence of others is not a sufficient condition to enable the collectivisation of the precariat into a self-aware class,

it is a necessary factor in the formation of 'social groups' into which precarious workers can self-categorise. Workers do not, however, self-categorise into employment groups only, which is why a person's 'social identity' is constructed from the totality of his or her social identifications (Tajfel, 1974; Ashforth and Mael, 1989). The merging of working and personal spheres in Standing (2014; 2011) may accord working contexts an important role in the formation of a person's 'social identity', yet this role is by no means exclusive. I am, therefore, not contesting the significance of the precarity context, yet propose that its impact on the worker can be moderated by a number of other personal and social identity aspects. Thus, if the moderation of precarious experiences can occur through participation in social identities, this suggests that those experiences are likely to be individualised, and subjectively 'sense-made' (Fiss and Hirsch, 2005; Weick, 1995).

In line with this, I do not reject that certain aspects of precarious work may carry stigma or, at the very least, be unpleasant and unpalatable. So much so, that those in them may not be willing to associate themselves with their working identities and even have an instrumental attitude towards work (Standing, 2011), regarding it as a means to an end. What I do reject is that those objective contexts of work are able to structurally determine the subjective experiences of precarious workers. As already proposed, the self-categorisation into a 'social group' is also a subjective process. This is so on account of it being based on individual worker perceptions of similarity to one group and differences to another and, thus, being a relational rather than objective assessment.

It is, also, a process which allows for different levels of worker participation and identification with the 'social group'. Tajfel and Turner (1979) have already identified 'social group' members' ability to follow interpersonal, as well as intergroup

behaviours, thus, proposing the availability of exit strategies if group membership ceases to be meaningful. Even self-categorisation as part of a precarious 'social group' is open to development in order to balance personal and social identity aspects (Kreiner et al., 2006). Here, the presence of an 'out-group' can offer a source of difference against which members of the precarious 'social group' can unite. When this happens, it can enable the individual worker's emotional investment into the values, ethos and practices of his or her 'social group'. This is no longer categorisation into, or identification with a 'social group', but rather a process of 'internalisation' of the group's beliefs and values and, in turn, suggests meaningful 'intending' (Sokolowski, 2000) of the precarious work context (Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

However, the movement from identification to 'internalisation' of the 'social group' identity is neither gradual, nor unavoidable and individuals could exit the group at any point where membership ceases to be meaningful. In Goffman's (1971:139) view, this is the process of learning about social values, whilst aware of incomplete personal fit in them and difference from them. Previous experiences are of crucial importance, as they could be the bench-mark against which new situations and individuals are compared and behaviours based on the success of previous judgements. In order to be accepted as members of group, therefore, there has to be cohesion between the 'front' presented to others, the 'performance' based on this front and the 'setting' in which the 'performance' takes place (Goffman, 1971:32-37). Consequently, the move from 'I' to 'we' which accompanies the adoption of a social identity could supersede individual identity as a determinant of behaviour and attitudes, is neither straightforward nor guaranteed to happen whenever an individual enters into a 'social group'. As a process, it has to offer personal significance and external recognition (Serino, 1998:24). It is also affected by the presence or absence of values with which

new members can identify and internalise during the process of 'socialisation' (Ahuja and Galvin, 2003; Allen and Meyer, 1990; Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Verkuyten (2014), nevertheless, argues that individuals ordinarily experience 'affect hunger' for meaningful, fulfilling and self-affirming social ties, relationships and connections. Stable and realised identities are, consequently, of immense personal significance as they could not only moderate the experience of external structures as well as impact individual self-concepts and personal well-being. Through this, they could also strengthen intra-group ties and develop interactions into relationships (Verkuyten, 2014:41

'Social identities' are, also, inherently negotiable and, consequently, can be managed through a 'social mobility' strategy, based on the belief that an individual can leave the group whenever participation ceases to offer positive meaning (Trepte, 2012). Standing (2011) poses a suitable challenge here, by suggesting that the precariat's experiences and involvement with low-skill and low-pay work prevent them from successfully pursuing 'social mobility' strategies and exiting. Precarious workers, therefore, may simply be unable to find another job, or, another job may not be available. Does this not point to precarious work as special case, a context which 'trumps' the impact of the 'social group' proposed by SIT? This does not have to be the case since, if 'social mobility' is not possible, a 'social change' strategy can be deployed by the members of the precarious 'social group' (Trepte, 2012). In turn, this could lead to 'social comparison' through which the individual could cement the superiority of his or her group in relation to other groups. Rather than undertaking an objective assessment of their current precarity context, the worker may compare themselves to other 'social groups', perhaps those who are unemployed, or even 'social groups' in which they have participated in the past. This does not mean the

that the 'in-group' superiority is likely to be immediately established yet, even if it is not, a 'social creativity' approach can also be deployed. In this case, the precarious worker may re-construct their 'in-group' and compare it with 'out-groups' based on other criteria. Thus, a positive comparison between the 'in-group' and 'out-groups' may not be possible along the lines of access to meaningful remuneration, training, development and other aspects of Standing's (2011) model (see also Table 2, Chapter 2). In those instances, positive comparison may still be possible, for example, by using meaningful work-based relationships, individual enjoyment and so on, as the benchmarks. Miller and Brewer (1984) offer further insights into how the dynamic of inter and intra-group contact could be studied. In agreement with Tajfel and Turner (1979) they argue that being a member of an 'in-group' could moderate the worker's perceptions of 'out-groups'. This is possible even when the classification as part of an 'in-group' is random or arbitrary. Contextualised against my study, this random or arbitrary classification can be exemplified by a worker taking-up a precarious position and joining a corresponding precarious 'social group' not through choice but simply because this job is the only one available at the time. Even this, however, can be enough for him or her to be prejudiced against 'out-groups' and show positive bias against their own 'social group'. Thus, 'social group' membership can both moderate the impact of external ('out-group') opinions and also allow the worker to subjectively re-construct their experiences in line with the positive bias accorded to the 'in-group' (Haslam, 2001; Brewer, 1996; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). The very presence of an 'out-group' can increase the cohesion of the 'in-group' and enable it to serve as the benchmark in relation to which members of the 'in-group' can 'sense-make' (Weick, 1995) their experiences. This is particularly significant for my study, as it presents precariousness as a relational, rather than an absolute experience. It also challenges

earlier conceptualisations of precariousness as always negative and always occurring within low-pay, low-skill structures regardless of the agency of workers within them.

These considerations are also significant as they challenge the premise that an overarching antagonist can serve as the Other in opposition to which a class can emerge. As already discussed, for Marxists this Other is capital, while for Standing (2015) it is the State. SIT, however, recognises the potential existence of not one but multiple others. These 'others' are the 'out-groups' in opposition to which an 'in-group' can form and offer meaning and fulfilment to its members. In turn, this presents the possibility of multiple and fragmented 'precariats', as opposed to a single, collectivised, or moving towards collectivisation and class-consciousness, precariat. Yet, the absence of overarching precariat cohesion does not prevent precarious workers from meaningful participation in 'social groups'. While such participation could enable the 'internalisation' (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) of the group's values and ethos, this does not have to be the case and individuals could move into the opposite direction, leaving the 'social group'. Even when 'social mobility' (Trepte, 2012) is not possible, precarious workers could negotiate their social identities through 'social comparison' and 'social change' strategies. Through this, precarious workers retain their ability to subjectively re-construct their experiences of the context and, thus, moderate the deterministic impact of negative precarious structures.

### *Summary*

In Chapter 4, the final literature review chapter in the thesis, I conclude my evaluation of existing precariat conceptualisations and adopt a position which challenges the structural determinism of precarity contexts on worker experiences. Having distinguished between precarity contexts and precarious experiences in Chapter 3,

the purpose of the current chapter has been determine whether precariousness should be studied in collective terms, as the shared experience of insecurity.

I approached this by considering the degree of intra-precariat cohesion, as well as its capacity for collective action as a class-like entity, through an investigation of its subculture. In order to do this, I recognised that the precariat experience could be one of conflict between external structures, and personal choices/experiences. This conflict, however, does not manifest itself through the precariat's explicit rejection of dominant symbols and structures by means of subverting everyday items and using them as part of a symbolic and subcultural uniform, the way British Mod and Rocker groups did in the 1960s (Cohen, 1980).

There is evidence, however, of international protests uniting precarious groups under a common goal and towards a joint rejection of the labour market status quo. Portuguese and EuroMayDay parades are offered as examples of just such protests by Standing (2011) and Antunes (2013) . Recourse to earlier discourses, such as the precarity of modernity, however, provides a different perspective by suggesting they were not a purely precariat doing but part of over-arching experiences of insecurity and risk, shared by all humanity. Such a reading, furthermore, calls into question the indiscriminate application of 'precarity' to micro and meta-contexts, as this not only causes the concept to overlap with other frameworks, but reduces researcher ability to comment on the experiences of precarious workers.

In order to explicitly focus on those, I explore the scope for precarious workers' ability to re-construct the negative impact of precarity contexts through participation in 'social groups'. Standing (2011) regards the precariat as having a 'truncated' identity on account of its lacking access to meaningful work, either in terms of remuneration, and

development, or social status. SIT, however, points to the complex construction of 'social identities', which incorporate multiple personal and social aspects, leaving the individual scope to negotiate their self-concept. At the same time, group membership seems to be of significant individual importance in a context of modernity, with its fragmented support-structures of work, family and the community. Group identity, furthermore, could become a more dominant determinant of behaviour, than the person's own, individual identity in a particular context, for instance, the one of precarious work.

A number of counter-arguments could be made at this point, based on Standing's (2011) own conceptualisation. Thus, it could be pointed-out that in order to be meaningful and sustainable a 'social identity' needs to be based on the equally meaningful membership to a professional group. This, arguably, is not the case of the precariat who are unable to escape the self-perpetuating cycle of low-pay, low-skill work with its stigma, insecurity and commodification. Furthermore, for Standing (2011), membership to a low-status group, recipient of both economic subordination and the carrier of stigma, is unlikely to offer such meaning and fulfilment. SIT perspectives, nevertheless, suggests that even random classification of individuals to a 'social group' and the presence of a different 'out-group', can enable cohesion and the display of bias by those individuals towards the 'out-group' (Miller and Brewer, 1984; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Experiences of precarious contexts, thus, do not constitute an empirical assessment of the present reality, or its objective evaluation but leave scope for subjectivity and bias. If individual workers not only categorise themselves as part of a 'social group', but 'internalise' its values and ethos, this could further enhance the level of 'in-group' cohesion and its positive evaluation by participant members. Where this is the case, it can have a positive effect on individual



well-being and not only add to the worker's self-esteem but cause his or her 'I' to become 'we', elevating 'social group' interactions to relationships.

This has a significant consequence for my theoretical conceptualisations of the precarious experience as contextualised to low-pay and low-skill jobs but not structurally determined by them. Furthermore, as influenced not only by the present terms of employment, but also relative to the experiences of 'out-groups' and moderated by the worker's classification into a 'social groups', of which professional ones are one type. Thus, in Chapter 5 I outline the philosophical underpinnings, methodology and method through which I approach the study the precarious experiences of low-skill and low-pay workers in the South West of Britain.

## CHAPTER 5: PARADIGM, METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

In Chapter 5 I position the research within a suitable philosophical framework, in order to connect the theoretical underpinnings outlined so far, to the epistemological and ontological assumptions of my empirical enquiry. The use of first-person narrative, used in the literature chapters continues here also, as an acknowledgement of my active position and role in co-constructing the meaning of precarious work together with my research participants (Holloway, 1997:73).

Chapter 5 begins with a brief overview of phenomenology, which Husserl (1983:148) regards as the first philosophy, selected as the philosophical paradigm for my investigation.

Next, I consider the practical implications of this phenomenological foundation and connect it to a qualitative methodology, reflecting the epistemologically-interpretivist proximity between researcher and reality in my study, as well as the ontologically-constructivist view of a reality shaped by social agents. A semi-structured interview method and a phenomenological 'meaning condensation' analysis approach (Kvale, 1996; 2013) are discussed, in turn, and issues of bias addressed and contextualised against my selection of typical and contrasting participant groups.

I conclude the chapter by providing a step-by-step outline of the phenomenological 'meaning condensation' method and demonstrating it through an excerpt from an interview narrative.

### *Phenomenology: the First Philosophy*

I have already proposed that individual identities have a role in moderating the impact of precarious work, as well as the need to study precariousness as a wider range of experiences, both positive and negative. There are a number of discourses explaining

individual experiences in socio-economic terms and even making inferences of how conditions of work are likely to be experienced. Consequently, I wished to adopt an approach which did not make the same assumptions about the context of precarity determining worker experiences. Rather, I chose to go back to 'the things themselves', to paraphrase Husserl's (1969) phenomenological motto, and study worker experiences as framed by the workers themselves. While this did not preclude the context from having a significant impact, it enabled me to study this impact as one among a number of factors. Furthermore, I wished to give the workers in my sample the choice of bringing those factors up, rather than make an *a priori* assumption about them.

Phenomenology, despite being a non-homogenous discipline and undergoing complex formulation in the work of, among others, Husserl (1969), Heidegger (2001) and Sartre (2003), thus, offers a suitable starting point. Specifically, it seeks to formulate the process through which phenomena appear to consciousness for the first time. The role of the observer is significant, as the experience of precarity is a process which depends on whom the viewer is (compare with Ladkin, 2010:16-17). As such, it is a paradigm congruent with the study's own formulation of precariousness as a dynamic between the subjectivity of experience and objectivity of context, rather than a one-way process of cause and effect.

Literary theorist Eagleton (2003) also underscores the role of the observer in describing phenomenology as a science of subjectivity which regards the (precarious worker) subject as the source of all meaning. Phenomenology is a study of social actors' engagement with objects in the world, the latter viewed in terms of lived experience rather than scientific abstraction or scientific laws. Accordingly, the world is a lived world, or a *Lebenswelt*, a Lifeworld (Sokolowski, 2000). The

phenomenological Lifeworld is not the world of objectively verifiable and abstracted laws and principles but does circumscribe them, and what is more, enables them to exist and manifest themselves. Idealised scenarios of cause and effect, and abstract relationships do not exist here, but their construction is possible through human 'intentionality' and imagination. The Lifeworld, thus, includes the external reality of structure and work, yet not that which is objectively verifiable but the one which can be personally experienced by the individual subject (Eagleton, 2003). The significance of personal experience can be traced back to the Cartesian *cogito* principle, expressed exactly as *cogito*, that is, 'I think', rather than the infinitive form of the verb 'to think', which would have suggested that it was 'thinking' in general which indicated being, regardless of who did the thinking .

An early challenge to the onus on subjectivity is presented by Kant who, dissatisfied with the Cartesian principle, can be interpreted as disagreeing with the above premises and arguing that just because there is 'thinking' going on, it does not follow that there is an 'I' doing the thinking. Notwithstanding, Kant does accept the significance of subjectivity in world knowledge, which can be seen as extending, rather than replacing, the personal perspective (Scruton et al, 2010:18-24) and through this connecting the person with the world. Consequently, the phenomenological investigation of the world is no less than "the exploration of ourselves in our humanity" (Sokolowski, 2000:117). Members of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory are, also, sceptical of phenomenological assumptions practices, which are perceived as little more than the manifestation of 'bourgeois individuality' (Moran, 2000:21). Phenomenologists reciprocate this challenge by stating (Moran, 2000:289) that Critical Theory's *modus operandi* of challenging existing structures is self-serving in itself.

Looking back to the paradigm's origins, in Husserl (1983:xvii-xx) phenomenology is, simply, the "science of phenomena", Sartre's (2003) accusations of this being not phenomenology but sensory phenomenism, notwithstanding. This most certainly is not what Husserl (1983) is trying to achieve and he intends to get to the *eidos*, 'essence' or 'form', of phenomena as they appear to the observer's consciousness, rather than just describe them. In Eagleton's view (2003:87), Husserl's transcendental phenomenology seeks the means to overcome the 'natural attitude', that is, the view that objects have an existence independent of their observers. Instead, the observer should trust the way objects appear to his or her consciousness, regardless of whether the resulting experiences are real, or illusory. This is so, as for him, objects cannot be regarded as 'things-in-themselves', but rather, exist as forms in our consciousness. Consciousness is, in turn, inadvertently consciousness *of* something, it 'intends' the world and is directed at objects. In this sense consciousness is not passive reflection of the world, but a process of actively structuring and constructing it. This is how Husserl (1983:148) comes to regard phenomenology as the 'first philosophy', on account of its engaging with experiences as they first manifest themselves.

A student of Husserl's, Heidegger (1962:50; 59-61) develops his own approach to phenomenology, a hermeneutical approach of "methodological conception", that is, an approach pertaining to 'how' the investigation of phenomena should be carried-out, rather than 'what' is being studied. For Heidegger, this is best encapsulated in Husserl's *zu den Sachen Selbst*, "to the things themselves" motto. Apart from being a "science of phenomena", phenomenology thus becomes a "science of the Being of entities", an ontology which considers *Dasein*, literally, the 'being there' [in the world] of entities. *Dasein* is a condition which extends only to conscious beings, not all living things, and not the collective of humanity, but the specific person, the individual with

a personal experience of the Lifeworld and is represented in the subjectivity of the first-person pronoun.

Heidegger (1962) explains that phenomenology is etymologically derived from the Greek verb from which the noun *phenomenon* comes and which means to show, or to reveal. The *phaeno* root specifically refers to the 'light of day', which points to the purpose of phenomenology as a science which, literally, brings phenomena 'to light'. Does phenomenology show inherent naiveté on account of what seems to be its willingness to take things at face value? In line with this, can findings, obtained from a phenomenological investigation be ever deemed valid? I discuss those points below, but for now it is sufficient to explain that the 'bringing to life', requires the interpretation of phenomena against the context against which they manifest themselves. Heidegger (1962), thus, sees in phenomenology the scope for historical hermeneutics, where the part of a phenomenon under consideration is regarded in a way which complements the phenomenon whole, not separated in order to find isolated meanings (Moran, 2000:272). Although subjective consciousness has a central role here, phenomenology moves beyond the consciousness of the author/storyteller and seeks to understand phenomena better than the person narrating them (Dilthey, 1976:16; Moustakas, 1994:8-9). With this in mind, the understanding of experiences is obtained not through regarding individual narratives in isolation, but comparing and contextualising them against the 'whole' of the experience, as presented by all workers in the sample.

Thus, phenomenology has "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (Heidegger, 1962:58), yet without the reductive limitation of the precarious experience (of workers in the sample) to any assumed constituent parts, such as insecurity, anxiety and so on. The phenomenological

interpretation has to add 'originality' and 'intuition' to the phenomenon under investigation, rather than naïve observation and 'beholding'. This, however, does not guarantee that objects, events and phenomena in general present themselves to the beholder in their absolute totality. Accordingly, Heidegger allows for the possibility of entities appearing as that which they are not, seeming but not being thus, as they manifest themselves (Heidegger, 1962:51). Being, after all, is complex and presents itself in 'manifolds', which could obstruct the interpretation of the Lifeworld (Heidegger, 1962:51-54; 58-61). Whilst for Husserl phenomenological knowledge is absolutely categorical, or, 'apodictic', intuitive and unmistakable, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology moves away from the transcendental individual, and towards a conscious and historical dialogue with the world (Eagleton, 2003:82-87).

Consciousness, therefore, connects those in the Lifeworld with the Lifeworld itself and could help distil the meanings of phenomena based on sensory input. This requires a conscious bracketing of researcher preconceptions, an *epoché*, which moves the investigation beyond naïve description and, through researcher reflection, understands the experience across all its 'manifolds'. Thus, in order to be able to consciously regard phenomena, the researcher needs to bracket all that which is above and beyond his or her immediate experiences, and reduce the external world to that which is contained in consciousness (Eagleton, 2003:74-76). Personal views are, therefore placed inside the brackets, not denied or hidden, but temporary put on hold (Moran, 2000:147-149). It also means that phenomenological research is done with, not to others (Moustakas, 1994:21) which refutes earlier accusations of taking things at face value. Phenomenological investigations, thus, can be described as the conscious engagement of the researcher with an object, or phenomenon, as long as it (object or phenomenon) is in *a priori* existence (compare with Sartre, 2003:vii; 12;

59). It is, thus, the acquisition of knowledge through 'intentionality'. The concept of 'intentionality' signifies a move away from seeing and thinking of phenomena in the everyday, 'natural attitude', to the 'intentional', or, 'transcendental attitude' (Sokolowski, 2000:42). Therefore, 'intending' in a phenomenological paradigm requires conscious (cognitive) engagement, indeed, 'relationship' with an object (Sokolowski, 2000:8).

As already discussed, this move away from the 'natural' into the 'transcendental', or phenomenological, attitude requires the Husserlian (1983:33-35) *epoche*, the suspension of judgements, preconceptions, views and categories and a return 'to the things themselves'. It is also important to acknowledge that applying the *epoche* and carrying-out the phenomenological reduction does not mean that the phenomenon's manifolds are reductively explained as simple occurrences. Rather, it is a process which forces researchers to view the observed phenomenon which is likely to be already familiar to them, in a new and novel way, noting it in all its nuanced richness (Moran, 2000:60-70). The phenomenological attitude is, thus, not in opposition to the natural attitude but seeks to complement and supplement its limitations, enabling the researcher to engage with studied phenomena 'intuitively', that is, cognitively and reflectively. For this to be possible, I have to enter the *epoche*, bracket my preconceptions, and suspend my judgement in order to discover new aspects of the phenomenon, as though seeing it for the first time. The process of bracketing, however, does not remove me from being in close epistemological proximity to the study, neither does it give me a synoptic vantage point from where I alone can understand the phenomenon of precariousness. Having entered the *epoche*, my 'intending' of a phenomenon is still through my subjective 'I' (Giorgi, 1985:69; Moustakas, 1994:13).



The presence of 'intersubjectivity', in turn, underscores the existence of phenomena in a shared world of shared experience, rather than solipsistic isolation. Phenomenology does not reject the external reality of the context, and this is particularly eminent in Heidegger's (1962) *Dasein* as the conscious experience of the external world, not the ideal and isolated state of consciousness. The reality of work with its precarious structures, policies, legislation, national State context and international labour market exists, influences and enables experiences of precariousness. This does not, however, mean that it also deterministically structures precariousness, and limits the range of precariousness to the isolated experience of the worker. This is an experience of a complex phenomenon, or even set of phenomena, whose manifold *eidos*, or essence, does not fully manifest itself to conscience at any single point, nor can be disclosed simply by sensory input.

Accordingly, it is necessary for the researcher's 'imaginative variation' to enable the movement from different aspects, or 'parts' of the experience, to its 'whole'. This, however, does not mean that the researcher seeks to take phenomenon and consider its aspects in abstraction (Eagleton, 2003:83) but rather, start and end with the phenomena as it appears to consciousness. This is very significant for the construction of precariousness and its testing since it prohibits the abstraction of the precariousness phenomena to a wider set of relationships such as poverty, commodification, flux and individualisation. Rather, it necessitates an investigation of the phenomena the way they appear, namely as subjectively-individualised and qualitatively-rich range of experiences. Accordingly, the meaning-condensation analysis (discussed below) moves from individual forms of expression ('meaning units') within an interview transcript, to a holistic interpretation of individual participant narratives, and towards a summary of the precarious experience as a whole and

across all research participants (Sokolowski, 2000:25; Moustakas, 1994:25-37). In the specific instance of precarious experiences, the combination and comparison of experiences across precarious and non-precarious groups of workers allows the manifold of those experiences to be constructed, yet this is not a straight-forward process. Specifically, as it carries an inherent danger of the researcher failing to capture the essence of the experience and offering a reductive explanation of non-essential characteristics. In my study, I seek to safeguard against this by speaking to participants in a number of precarity contexts, and then comparing their views with participants in a contrasting group (see Table 3 below). The inclusion of contrasting groups offers the additional utility of investigating the ‘determinism of working contexts on experiences’ claim from the opposing direction. Namely, it allows me to consider whether non-precarious conditions, represented by high-pay and high-skill roles can secure positive experiences for workers in them.

The final phenomenological precept is the presence/absence dyad, which Sokolowski (2000:33) associates with “filled” and “empty” intentions, respectively. Accordingly, the former are described as intentions aimed at an object which is present to the person intending, whilst the latter, as intentions aimed at something which is not physically present to the person intending. In this sense a “filled” intention of precarity is the intention of a worker labouring in conditions of precarity, whilst an empty intention is that of a member of a non-precarious group, who is aware of the condition but not currently experiencing it. This ability to discuss a condition without necessarily having direct experience is an additional factor informing my choice of non-precarious workers who are able to further my understanding of precariousness. Husserl (1983:100) proposes that consciousness of a phenomenon (‘intentionality’) on the part of an observer guarantees the phenomenon’s existence, with the implication that a

non-precarious worker could be aware of, and help illuminate the precariousness phenomenon as much as a precarious worker can.

In turn, experiences, thoughts, fantasies, memories are equally valid components of 'intentionality', able to 'bring to light' the essence of a given phenomenon (Moran, 2000:153). In this sense, the Lifeworld becomes a world of possibility, allowing the investigation of potential experiences, through the 'intentionality' of the experiencing person. Through this, phenomenology could move from discussing experiences outside of the present context and utilise memories of past events, future plans or fantasies (Sokolowski, 2000:74-75) which makes the paradigm particularly useful for the study of precariousness. Specifically, this enables me to study the impact not only of the present situation but that of past experiences and future intentions, which can be supplied by members of non-precarious groups, also. Phenomenological investigation could, once again, be accused of focusing on subjective experiences which could not be verified in an objective fashion. This, however, is refuted through the phenomenological assertion that it studies an accepted, existing and intersubjective reality which is seen and experienced in a shared manner. It does not mean that reality is accepted 'at face value' and researchers can move from intending events as they appear, that is transparently and truthfully, and into a 'doubting intention', that is, doubting the truthfulness, or at least the sincerity of what is presented. Phenomenology, therefore, is equipped to deal with issues such as intentional misrepresentation, vague, inconsistent and contradictory data, which issues can be exposed by its interpretation against the 'whole' of sample narratives (Sokolowski, 2000:99-108).

### *From Phenomenology to a Methodology*

The above considerations are significant for my research, as they offer support for my intention to explore the meaning of precarious work as relative to the person experiencing it and distinct, albeit not separate, from the structures within which it is experienced. They are also the foundation on which I articulate the inherent assumptions about the nature of reality and my proximity, as a researcher, to it. This, however, does not mean that placing my study in existing epistemological and ontological categories is a straight-forward process. In approaching existing categories I encountered a number of conceptual overlaps.

For instance, Bryman (2008) and Holloway (1997) regard epistemology as a 'theory of knowledge', defining what makes for acceptable knowledge. Epistemology is presented on a continuum, with positivism and interpretivism being the categorical extreme points. Holloway (1997:93) further states that the difference between the two rests in positivism's aim to *explain* reality through the natural sciences, whereas the interpretivism seeks to *understand* it.

Ontology, on the other hand, is a consideration of that which exists, and Bryman's (2008:18-19) taxonomy places ontological considerations also between two extremes, objectivism, and constructivism/constructionism. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998; 2009), however, replace objectivism with positivism, which for Bryman (2008) is an epistemological category. Holloway (1997:145) also applies constructionism and constructivism as synonymous assumptions of a socially-constructed reality and, thus, in opposition to positivism/objectivism. Howell (2013), however, offers a further distinction, namely, between constructivism and constructionalism which differ in conceptualising how meaning construction occurs. Specifically, constructivism regards the creation of epistemological knowledge as an individualised process,

carried-out by individual actors as they engage with their surrounding environments. Constructionalism, on the other hand, regards epistemological meaning formation as a social process, implying that, meaning formation is shared and occurs jointly, through social 'agreement' (Howell, 2013:89).

The above considerations suggest that epistemological and ontological categories overlap in the literature and do not exist as clear, or universally-accepted definitions. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998:23; 2009:86) also see the purpose of ontology as studying the nature of reality, that which exists, but for them (see also Mertens, 2003:75; Clarke and Creswell, 2008) epistemology is not the theory of knowledge described in Bryman (2008). Rather, it is the relationship between the researcher and that which is researched and, thus, a matter of proximity or distance between the two. These framings of epistemology, however, could be regarded as having common points, since the proximity between researcher and researched determine what constitutes as acceptable knowledge. Denzin and Lincoln (2013:26), on the other hand blur the difference between epistemology (as approaches to acceptable knowledge), and ontology (as stances on what exists in reality). For them, the overlap increases as they move away from the researcher/researched separation in the objective dualism of positivism, and towards the subjective inseparability of the two in constructivism/constructionalism (see also Mertens, 2003:75 in Clarke and Creswell, 2008).

From discussions in the preceding chapters and Chapter 5 so far, I have accepted the possibility of multiple realities, depending on the subjective viewpoint, as well as the possibility of their complex interpretation. The construction of precariousness as a relative and individualised experience against an 'in-group' and the wider economic context, furthermore, points to the study's assumptions of reality as shaped by

individual agents and revised over time. Both Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998:23; 2009:88) and Howell (2013:29) consider epistemological approaches along a continuum occurring between positivism and constructivism and my study's position is close to the latter, constructivist end. Ontological stances in Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998:23; 2009:88) and Howell (2013:29), on the other hand, range from the 'naïve realism' of a reality which can be fully-known, through the imperfect knowledge of reality in 'critical realism', via the diversity of viewpoints based on personal values or social justice, to the 'relativism' of multiple, co-constructed and subjective realities. As I am studying precariousness in individual worker constructions, I am more closely aligned with the latter, interpretivist epistemological (Holloway, 1997) perspectives of reality. Reality is, thus, subject to multiple interpretations and understood through a co-constructed and co-authored process of knowledge-formation between researchers and researched, which occurs in a specific context (Kvale, 1998). In my study this is the context of precarious work in the South West of Britain.

The phenomenological paradigm, interpretivist epistemological and constructivist ontological framework embedded in it are, consequently, particularly compatible with a qualitative research strategy. In terms of functional suitability, qualitative strategies offer significant utility for research into the meaning of precarious work, through the primacy which they accord to "thick descriptions", analysed and interpreted for rich meanings, rather than measured in terms of direction and causality. Researcher and researched are closely positioned, as equal stakeholders in the enquiry, with construction of meaning occurring in parallel and through input by both parties (Holloway, 1997:3-10). I recognise, at this point, that this approach runs the risk of researcher bias on account of my close positioning within the investigation, impacting on the quality of interview narratives and, consequently, my analysis of the precarious

work experience. Thus, in order to demonstrate the steps I took to safeguard against this I outline my approach by considering each of my study's participant groups in turn below.

### *Study Sample: Pilot Study*

The pilot study took place in the autumn of 2014. I wished to test both the interview questions (see Appendix A for my question sheet) and get an early indication of the worker experiences in precarious and non-precarious groups. I was intending to maximise participation by offering a variety of interview options, from face-to-face interviews, to Skype. I also wished to get the most of each interview and create an informal setting in which participants could relax and feel comfortable enough to discuss potentially unpleasant experiences of work. To do so, I was going to hold interviews with individual and multiple participants, as well as focus groups.

In line with this, I used opportunity sampling (Bryman, 2008) as an efficient and convenient means to test my questions and method of interviewing. My pilot study had six participants. Despite this being a pilot study, all interviews took place after Plymouth University's Ethics Committee had reviewed my proposal (see Appendix F) and approved my study. All participants were provided with an interview information sheet (see Appendix D) and asked to complete a consent form (see Appendix C). All signed consent forms are kept in safe storage on campus at Plymouth University.

As those were to be my first interviews, I felt a degree of trepidation and was pre-occupied with questions of whether I would be able to steer the discussion, and whether my questions would solicit participant responses. In line with this, I started with people whom I knew professionally, then moved to a participant whom I knew but had not been in contact for a number of years, and finished with a participant who was

completely unknown to me. Thus, I started with three Local Government Officers with whom I had worked in a previous, professional capacity. The first interview was with two participants, a male and a female, who were about to leave their Local Government employer. I interviewed them in person but did not record the conversation, preferring to make hand-written notes. The third Local Government Officer had left some weeks before the interview and moved to Australia, so I interviewed her over Skype, again making hand-written notes. Reviewing the notes after the interviews showed me that I had over-estimated my ability to capture the essence of what was being said in short-hand. Furthermore, I realised that I had failed to note a number of themes which emerged, which I could not remember well enough as to use. After those three interviews, I started audio-recording all discussions.

The fourth interview was with a school acquaintance, whom I contacted through Facebook and also interviewed over Skype. I recorded the interview and transcribed it myself. The fifth interview was a perfect instance of opportunity sampling as I approached the broadband technician who was installing a product at our house, who shared his dissatisfaction with his employer. After we spent some time discussing previous experiences of trying to balance work and family life, I explained my academic interest in work and working experiences, and he volunteered to participate in the study. The sixth and final interview took place on site of the adult care home, whose participants I used in my 'typical case' sampling (Wengraf, 2002). I had already been in discussion with the home manager, and was visiting the home in person in order to discuss dates and times for the interviews. After the meeting she suggested the gardener tending the grounds was free and willing to be interviewed if I was free, also. I had my recorder with me, so consented. I transcribed the interview myself.



The process of describing the pilot interviews highlighted another potential issue. I discovered that, at times, I was transcribing what I wished to hear, rather than what was being said, thus failing to adopt the phenomenological *epoche*. The 'meaning condensation' method required that I am receptive to all nuances and details of the phenomenon under investigation. I wished to begin my analysis of narratives as though seeing them for the first time so taking the above points into consideration, decided to use my postgraduate budget to have the interviews transcribed professionally. Doing so enabled me to distance myself from those who were telling the stories, and move towards the stories themselves, re-engaging with them as though they were new to me. It was also an efficient way of pursuing the research project in terms of timescales, since one hour of interview time could take a non-professional transcriber up to five hours of transcription time (Kvale, 2013:95) and my research had approximately 66 hours of interviews.

#### *Study Sample: Typical Cases (TC)*

Up-dating Patton's (1990) original typology, Wengraf (2002:102) presents a 'typical sampling' strategy, which I adopted as my sampling strategy, also. 'Typical case' sampling required me to approach the 'typical' representatives of a category and, using my own identity as a Bulgarian migrant and background as a precarious worker I decided to focus on Bulgarian migrants. In line with Standing's (2011; 2014) definition, I selected precarious migrants on account of their 'denizen' status both regarding work, and the State. Furthermore, I focused on migrants who were in the UK legally and were, thus, legally entitled to work, since the precariat are in danger of becoming, but are not yet 'criminalised'. At the same time, migrants were likely to hold low-pay and low-skill jobs and fulfil the 'typical' representative requirement.

My preference was to speak to as many nationalities, ages and occupations as possible, yet my move into the phenomenological paradigm helped me understand the purpose of my enquiry better. That is, I was seeking to study the precarious experience in as much depth as possible in order to understand it, rather than generalise or reductively explain it. My original intention would have been to expand the sampling frame of my enquiry to the population of all migrants in the South West of Britain, yet I knew that this approach which would be problematic in terms of sheer cost and timescale of execution.

In line with the trustworthiness criteria in Lincoln and Guba (in Bryman, 2008:30-32; Holloway, 1997:160-161), I sought to 'triangulate', the narratives through a process of comparing and contrasting the experiences across different participants (Wengraf, 2002:102-105). Thus, also using Savage et al. (2013) and Standing (2011), I extended the 'typical case' sample beyond the 'migrant' group, and included a 'care worker' group, and a 'commercial and hospitality' group. Those groups were all selected as also being 'typical representatives' of low-pay and low-skill work in the South West. A summary of those groups and method through which I made contact is presented in Table 3 below. This strategy also had the promise of offering rich stories, comparable to those of participants from 'intensity sampling' categories, the latter consisting of cases which are likely to offer rich and deep information, representing the phenomenon under investigation well (Wengraf, 2002).

Reason for Choice	Group	Number of Participants	Participant Gender Profile	Participant Job Profile	Interview Approach	Participant Contact and Recruitment Approach
Pilot Study	<b>Pilot</b>		4 x Female 2 x Male	1 x Self-employed Writer 1 x Self-employed Gardener 1 x Installation Technician 3 x Local Government Officers	3 x Individual Semi-structured Interviews 1 x Couple Semi-structured Interview 1 x Skype Interview	Opportunity sampling with participants chosen to approximate precarious (Gardener, Writer) and non-precarious (Local Government, Technician) roles. Both interview questions and approach (face-to-face, Skype, more than one participant) were tested.
Typical Cases (low pay, low-skill work)	<b>Migrants</b>		4 x Female 9 x Male	1 x Mechanic and Take-away Delivery Driver 1 x Care Assistant 2 x Waiters 1 x Self-employed Taxi Driver 1 x Fish and Chips Shop Assistant 1 x Self-employed Builder and Decorator 1 x Self-employed Builder 1 x Self-employed Cleaner	2 x Individual Semi-structured Interviews 3 x Individual Semi-structured Skype Interviews 2 x Couples Semi-structured Interview	Participants contacted through two Facebook Community Groups.
	<b>Care # 1</b> (Nursery Workers)	24	24 x Female	3 x Managers 14 x Fully-qualified Nursery Assistants 4 x Part-qualified Nursery Assistants 3 x Trainee Nursery Assistants	24 x Individual Semi-structured Interviews	Identified largest nursery care provider and was granted access.
	<b>Care # 2</b> (Adult Care Workers)	11	9 x Female 2 x Male	2 x Managers 8 x Care Assistants 1 x Trainee Care Assistant	11 x Individual Semi-structured Interviews	Contacted 2 major care home groups and 2 independent homes, only granted access to this one.
	<b>Commercial and Hospitality # 1</b> (Zero-hour Waiters and Bar Staff)	4	2 x Female 2 x Male	1 x Waiting Staff Supervisor 2 x Waiting Staff 1 x Bar Staff	4 x Individual Semi-Structured Interviews	Contacted 2 large hotels in the South West, only granted access to this one.
	<b>Commercial and Hospitality # 2</b> (Cleaners and Caterers for 'Cleanwell')	24	18 x Female 6 x Male	2 x Catering Staff Supervisors 2 x Cleaning Staff Supervisor 2 x Catering Staff 18 x Cleaning Staff	1 x Focus Group with 6 Staff (Cleaning and Catering) 1 x Focus Group with 7 Staff (Cleaning and Catering) 1 x Focus Group with 5 Staff (Cleaning) 1 x Focus Group with 6 staff (Cleaning)	Contacted 4 international employers with sites in the South West. The HR section of 'Cleanwell' granted me access to the their military base staff.
	<b>Local Government # 1</b> (Individual Workers)	4	2 x Female 2 x Male	2 x HR Consultants 1 x HR Officer 1 x Admin Officer	4 x Individual Semi-structured Interviews	Contacted Head of HR, sought corporate approval and invited volunteers.
Contrasting Cases	<b>Local Government # 2</b> (Focus Group)	4	3 x Female 1 x Male	2 x HR Officers 1 x Policy Officer 1 x Project Officer	1 x Focus Group based on vignette scenarios	Contacted Head of HR, sought corporate approval and invited volunteers.
	<b>CIPD</b> (Focus Group)	8	7 x Female 1 x Male	6 x HR Officers 1 x Business Officer 1 x CIPD Level 5 Student	1 x Focus Group based on vignette scenarios	A focus group with further education students on a Level 5 CIPD-accredited course in Human Resource Management at a South West College.
<b>Total participants</b>		94				
<b>Total interview hours</b>		Approx. 66				

Table 3: Participant profile, including roles, interview and recruitment approach

## TC1: Migrant Group

The migrant group consisted of nine participants, eight Bulgarian and one Spanish migrant worker. The Bulgarian interviews included two couples and all participants were contacted through Facebook. I was aware of Holloway's (1997) advice to acquire the permission of a 'gatekeeper' into a community, whilst taking care to remain attentive to the social setting, so as not to disrupt and unsettle, which can cause a 'Hawthorne effect' (Huczynski and Buchanan, 2013:332). To this end, I searched for Bulgarian communities in the South West, and discovered two, Bulgarians in Cornwall and Bulgarians in Devon. I then sent a private message to each page administrator ('gatekeeper') with a shortened version of my research brief, translated in Bulgarian, and asked if I could post it on the group wall, inviting volunteers. In both cases I was allowed to do so, but volunteers were not forthcoming and the process proved to be more time-consuming than initially anticipated. It took several reminders over the course of a month, before I could obtain participants with one of them recommending the Spanish migrant. On account of the generally low-level of English language proficiency in the Bulgarian group and since I had conversed with its members in Bulgarian from the beginning, I decided to carry-out the interviews in Bulgarian, also. I then recorded an audio translation from Bulgarian into English and had this transcribed professionally. Although this significantly helped my familiarity with the narratives, it also lengthened the process. I have experience of professional interpretation, having in the past worked as an NHS interpreter, yet found myself re-recording my translation of participant narratives numerous times, in order to best represent the meaning of slang words and expressions into English.

This was a time-consuming process, which suggested that in the future I should consider conducting all interviews in English. Nevertheless, holding the interviews in

Bulgarian turned them from an academic piece, to a conversation between ex-pats and my Bulgarian participants were able to overcome any natural reservations towards the process. In turn, this made the interview into a positive process, enabling them to use the interviews as an opportunity to 'sense-make' (Weick, 1995) past experiences, celebrate success and talk about future plans (Kvale, 1996). It also enabled my 'prolonged engagement' with participants in the group which not only created rapport and trust, but moved my investigation beyond that of a superficial, surface scrutiny (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

#### TC2: Care Workers Group

I sought to organise the 'care worker' interviews in parallel to the 'migrant group' and yet, the care setting proved just as challenging and time-consuming. I had made initial contact, by e-mail, with major providers across the South West and then followed initial e-mails up by phone, offering a face-to-face meeting. I was keeping a spreadsheet tracker listing each company and dates of e-mails sent or phone-calls made. Its final version showed that I had to contact (both via e-mail and telephone) the six providers over 20 times in order to be granted access to one care home and one nursery.

Nevertheless, when access was agreed, I was able to achieve high levels of participation and the 'care worker' group comprised of 24 nursery assistants and 11 adult care assistants.

#### TC3: Commercial and Hospitality Group

I had a similar experience when contacting hotels and requesting to interview zero-hour hospitality workers. Even in instances where the management team granted me access the recruitment of participants was slow, despite my efforts to communicate both the purpose and interview process through information sheets (Appendix D) and

posters (Appendix E). Thus, the hospitality group consisted of four individual interviews with zero-hour waiters and bar staff at a large South West hotel.

The commercial group, in turn, comprised of catering and cleaning staff working for Cleanwell, an international employer contracted by the Ministry of Defence. This group posed a different challenge, as I was granted time-limited access and had to maximise my time on site. On-site supervisors were able to organise four focus groups, with six, seven, five and six employees respectively, which I held over two days. In order to provide a starting point for the discussion, I created three vignettes (Appendix B) presenting different types of precarious experiences on which participants could comment (Holloway, 1997:163). Their use was, further, inspired by the research which my Director of Studies had carried-out for a nationally-representative study which combined lesbian, gay and bi-sexual work experiences with straight workers' perspectives (Hoel, et al., 2014). The use of focus group discussions, therefore, allowed the efficient use of time as well as, at times, enabling a more spontaneous and relaxed discussion. The challenge, on the other hand, was to steer but not stifle more dominant members of the group, while enabling everyone else to also participate

In order to be given access to Cleanwell employees, I was required to sign a confidentiality agreement, moving my treatment of the interview scripts to a level of strong anonymity (Wengraf, 2002:187) where participant ought not to recognise themselves. The practical aspect of the experience was also memorable and I was required to provide my passport details in advance for a background check. I had to have my photo taken at the entrance of the military base and was accompanied by an escort at all times during my two visits, even while driving between buildings on site. The Cleanwell experience, thus, prompted further considerations of anonymity, and I

decided that in presenting my findings, I would use a participant name which reflected the gender and ethnicity of the participant. There were practical benefits to such a process of anonymising participants which, once again, enabled me to distance myself from the person, and focus on the narrative instead (Holloway, 1997:49).

### *Study Sample: Contrasting Cases (CC)*

I wished to contrast the experience of precarious workers with those of workers outside the nominally precarious group. In doing so, I wished to chart the boundary of precariousness and, having tested how precarious workers feel, contextualise their experiences against high-paid and high-skilled workers.

#### CC1: Local Government Group

Therefore, I sought to identify a suitable employment group of typically non-precarious workers and approached a large Local Government organisation in the South West. I used former professional contacts to obtain the details of senior HR and Policy Officers, who were likely to be professionally qualified and better than minimum-wage remunerated. I e-mailed eight workers, of which only four agreed to take part. Thus, in order to increase my sample I e-mailed the Head of HR at the organisation with the request that a Department-wide e-mail is sent-out. My request was not met with immediate rejection, yet approval took six months to be granted. In this period I carried out the four individual interviews.

The Local Government organisation approved my request in April 2015 and a Department-wide e-mail was sent out, requesting for focus group volunteers. Regrettably, this was met with low levels of response and despite six people contacting me to confirm participation; only four were available on the day. For the Local Government focus group I also used the three vignettes I had already piloted at

Cleanwell. I found that although the vignettes focused on precarious work, participants were not providing exclusively contrasting experiences but, rather, explained that they have themselves had similar experiences in their own working history with the present organisation and in the past.

## CC2: CIPD Group

I was also approached by a South West College for Further Education with the request that I present my research to a CIPD group. I saw this as an opportunity for another focus group, and used my presentation as a spring-board to introduce my study and invited participation after the session. Eight CIPD members stayed behind and took part in a focus group, which was, also, based on the three vignettes as a starting point for the discussion of workplace experiences. As with the Local Government focus group, the CIPD group also shared their own instances of having precarious experiences.

In an attempt to increase my sample of contrasting cases, I had also approached a large NHS Trust in Wales, through a contact provided by my Director of Studies. My request to carry-out research at the Trust was approved, yet despite numerous e-mails inviting staff participation over the November 2014 – March 2015 period, there were no volunteers and I was forced to abandon the NHS group.

Through following the above I approach I, thus, sought to fulfil the ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘authenticity’ for qualitative research. Broadly conceptualised, ‘trustworthiness’ is comparable to quantitative uses of ‘validity’, or, the ability of an inquiry to actually measure that which it intends to measure (Butler-Kisber, 2010:14; Field, 2013). Since qualitative research seeks to understand the whole, rather than measure and test the relationship between its constituent parts, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985 in Bryman, 2008;



Holloway, 1997:160-161) use of 'trustworthiness' is as a means of assessing whether qualitative findings of the phenomenon are, indeed, useful in providing knowledge of the studied phenomenon. In relation to this, four categories of trustworthiness are considered.

First, 'credibility' is comparable to 'internal validity' in quantitative research and aimed at demonstrating that findings are meaningful and represent the participants with integrity. As part of my interviews I sought to engage participants and share my interpretations of precariousness with them, asking them to comment, clarify and add through their own experiences, past or present. I also shared comments offered in previous interviews with subsequent participants. The purpose of this, throughout, was to keep comparing individual 'parts' against the precarious experience's 'whole'.

Second, 'transferability' is comparable to external quantitative validity, in other words, a measure of the significance a piece of qualitative research has, given its potentially small sample-size. In this sense, I used semi-structured interviews in order to avoid the constraints and rigidity of structured interviewing and to allow my respondents to take part in steering the narrative construction. It also enabled participants to discuss even those aspects of precariousness which my preliminary framing had failed to consider, expanding the theoretical meaning of the experience to match the full range of worker accounts. This, however, also required a greater degree of planning and preparation, as befitted a process of two-way interaction and interview control shared by both parties. At the same time, a degree of flexibility had to be accepted and even built on, allowing me to refine the process as I went along and 'got wiser' (Kvale, 1996:100) through reflecting on the interview experience and my method.

The steps I took to ensure the 'credibility' of my data also apply to the third trustworthiness factor, that of 'dependability' which refers to the inferences I made from participants' statements. Hycner (1985) further suggests that the researcher returns to co-researchers (participants) with a summary of the particular script, yet this proved problematic in my study as participants were unwilling, or unable, to set aside additional time when I contacted them. In line with this, I amended my approach and, as already discussed, maximised my time with each participant, checking my understanding against theirs and asking them to comment on aspects of previous participants' narratives. Also in adherence to this consideration, I have sought to outline the steps of my approach to data analysis in as much detail as possible.

Lastly, 'confirmability' aims at demonstrating that original voices are not overtly replaced by researcher bias, while recognising that the latter is, nevertheless, present and should be acknowledged, rather than covered-up. This is particularly central to the purpose of phenomenology, which advocates the return to 'the things themselves' that is, phenomena as they manifest themselves, rather than framed or reductively described. Accordingly, my use of semi-structured interviews and conscious attempt not to steer the discussion back on track immediately after the participant had moved in a different direction, were adopted in order to allow participant voices to emerge. This approach reflected my anticipation of potentially rich and nuanced participant narratives, despite this potential not always being realised. Lincoln and Guba (1985; see also Bryman, 2008:379-380; Holloway, 1997:162) further propose a number of 'authenticity' criteria to be applied in the testing of 'data goodness'.

First, is the need to present participants' viewpoints fairly, that is, not purposefully engaging in dishonest, 'bad research'. The inclusion of as much detail and rich, original input to support research interpretations in the following chapter is adopted to

address this requirement. Next, are categories of 'ontological' authenticity, considering the impact of research on the area of research and 'educative' authenticity, helping members of the group understand each other and their wider setting. As my interviews allowed participants to discuss their experiences, celebrate success and find out about others sharing in their difficulties, the process had a cathartic quality. Through this, it helped them 'sense-make' (Weick, 1995) their position in a milieu of shared experiences – not all of them negative. As a case in point, and having carried out a number of interviews at a care home setting, I was invited to return, as the first group of respondents had enjoyed the opportunity to reflect and take pride in the impact of their work.

#### *Matching the Methodology to a Method of Analysis*

The discussion above outlines the separation between structure and experience and subsequent development of precariousness as a construct centred on the individual and relative to their own experiences, past and present. It is, however, necessary to acknowledge that the process of literature review and selection of a suitable philosophical grounding for the study's ontological and epistemological frameworks was not a linear process. Before positioning the study, I considered a number of philosophical paradigms, including Theodore Adorno (1979) and Max Horkheimer's (1972) approaches Critical Theory, as well as William James' (2000) pragmatism. In line with this, and before the selection of a sampling strategy and method of analysis, the research aim and objectives of the study underwent a number of changes.

The initial set of research questions, therefore, reflected the study's initial acceptance of dominant narratives of an insecure precariat, whose experiences were structured by their subordinate position within the labour market. At the beginning of my

investigation I assumed precarious workers to be insecure, and wished to test the degree of insecurity through a deductive research strategy:

Research Question mark I: Are workers able to distinguish between degrees/types of insecurity, in their particular individual circumstances?

As the theoretical conceptualisation moved on, I revised the above question and split it into two:

Research question mark II (a): Can secure employment lead to worker precarity and insecurity?

Research question mark II (b): Can security be experienced in conditions of employment precarity?

This was, however, unsatisfactory as it revealed another inherent ambiguity, that between insecurity and precarity (discussed in earlier chapters). Consequently, the research question underwent iteration once again:

Research question mark III: What are the conceptual boundaries between 'precarity' and 'insecurity' when applied to employment environments and worker experiences?

The decision to distinguish between contexts and experiences, as well as the adoption of phenomenology as a paradigm of enquiry, enabled me to adopt an approach which could not only accommodate the inherent complexity of the 'precarity' construct, but address the potential richness of corresponding experiences. By returning to the 'workers themselves', I could avail myself of the need to simplify the concept, or choose a synonym which could operationalise it for a colloquial use. Thus, I chose to offer participants the opportunity to discuss their precarious experiences employment

in terms of their own choice which placed them in the position of co-researchers and allowed them to take the narrative in the direction they felt best corresponded to their experience. Consequently, I set myself the task of investigating:

Research Question 1: Can workers re-construct their (negative) precarious experiences away from the determinism of precarity contexts?

Research Question 2: If workers can re-construct their (negative) precarious experiences away from the determinism of precarity context what factors would enable workers to achieve this re-construction?

Answering these questions required a different and very particular type of analysis, which was also consistent with the methodology and wider paradigm of my enquiry and I adopted the 'meaning condensation' approach discussed, for instance, in Giorgi, 1975 (in Kvale, 1996:193-196) and comparable with Giorgi (1979 in Moustakas, 1994:13-16, Holloway (1997:119-120) and Hycner (1985). Grounded in the phenomenological *modus operandi* of understanding individual experiences from the perspective of the individuals themselves, this method necessitates the provision of detailed descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation. This enabled me to go beyond the need to fit participant narratives into pre-made categories such as 'stigma' and 'false consciousness', yet allowed me to nevertheless address them, were they to be brought up. It also required me, as the researcher, to give particular attention to all narrative details, so as to avoid overlooking a perhaps mundane, but significant theme. What it did not guarantee, however, was that participant narratives would contain those details in the first place. Nevertheless, I could try and maximise the likelihood of rich descriptions by approaching as wide a group as participants as possible, which would enable the identification of essential themes across them. However, the value

of phenomenological enquiry rests with its ability to move from identifying individual 'parts' of a phenomenon and towards understanding the manifold 'whole' (Sokolowski, 2000). Consequently, narrative richness and depth is of greater value to the researcher, than the sheer breadth of narratives, not least because generalisation is outside the scope of qualitative design (see Bryman, 2008; Kvale, 1996). As a result, and having completed the analysis, I had to select for inclusion those narratives which were not only representative of the experience under investigation, but illustrated it in most detail (see, for example, Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994).

A common characteristic of the above authors' discussion is the degree of flexibility accorded to researchers wishing to apply 'meaning condensation' (Moustakas, 1994:90-101). Whilst this is well-fitted to my own qualitative methodology and use of semi-structured interviews, I wished to create a more detailed outline of analysis steps which to guide me, as I first engaged with the data and started to analyse it. The process of doing so included the creation of a cross-comparison table with step-by-step overviews of phenomenological meaning condensation approaches expanding on the above summary. Then, I looked for overlaps in order to expand and better understand the requirements of the given step. Missing or implied steps in a particular model were replaced by reference to another model in order to preserve a logical continuation of the phenomenological analysis. No new steps were added and no steps were taken away.

Table 4 provides a detailed outline of the steps in 'meaning condensation' analysis, and I demonstrate my own application of the method by using an excerpt from an interview transcript.

Step No.	Description of Phenomenological Analysis Required	Source
1	Formulate the research problem so that it is understandable to those being researched.	Kvale, 2013; 1996
2	Carry-out interviews and obtain "descriptive narratives"	Kvale, 2013; 1996
3	Transcribe interviews using written style.	Hycner, 1985; Kvale, 1996
4	Researcher preconceptions and expectations are actively excluded (bracketed) before first reading.	Hycner, 1985

Table 4: Step by step detailing of the meaning condensation phenomenological method (continued)

5	Read all scripts in their entirety and to achieve familiarity with description. Ensure that: * This reading is active, with the researcher noting down impressions from the interview.	Moustakas, 1994; Hycner, 1985
6	Carry-out line by line analysis of individual scripts with the purpose of 'horizontalising', that is: * Identifying all "meaning units" referring to the experience under investigation. * Expressing those in close adherence to the words the participant. * Including potentially useful statements even if ambiguous.	Moustakas, 1994; Kvale, 1996; Hycner, 1985
7	Analyse "meaning units" by: * Eliminating repetitive, ambiguous and non-autonomous statements. * Testing each statement for hidden meanings, refer to interview audio if necessary.	Moustakas, 1994; Hycner, 1985
8	Combine individual units first into clusters, based on commonality and validate by: * Comparing them to the holistic description of the participant experience. * Eliminating those either not matched, or not expressed explicitly.	Moustakas, 1994; Hycner, 1985
9	Once validated, transform clusters to form themes, providing a 'textural' description of each interview, using verbatim quotes to ground in original narrative.	Moustakas, 1994; Hycner, 1985
10	Having created 'textural' descriptions, add individual 'structural' details, showing not only 'what' is experienced, but 'where' and 'how' by: * Focusing on the structures of the context, tracing experiences against a variety of backgrounds. * Forming a 'textural-structural' description for each participant.	Moustakas, 1994
12	Combine individual accounts into a composite description of how the phenomena are experienced by the whole group.	Moustakas, 1994; Hycner, 1985

Table 4: Step by step detailing of the meaning condensation phenomenological method

### *Example of a 'Meaning Condensation' Analysis*

*Original Text* [A=answer; Q=question]



A: They say Bulgarians are egotistical and only think of themselves, but I feel that Britain has more egotistical people, as soon as they ask me if I am from Bulgaria I know what they are thinking...

Q: Who asks you?

A: Not the residents [in the Care Home where she works], but people in the bank, the Council, it happens from the older generation [of British people] who should know better. There are a lot of immigrants who come here for the benefits, but I haven't come here to live because I love England, I have come here for the money, to work for money, I like England but I would rather come and earn lots of money and go back to my own country. If my country had sufficient employment opportunities I would never have left.

Q: What was it like when you first came over?

A: I was lucky that I found some employers in [name of town], you can't *not* appreciate someone who has helped you and moan about the wages, a friend who I have known for 40 years asked me to come here because there is work, in Bulgaria I used to work in a paint shop and I wasn't getting paid, didn't get paid for, like, six months. I had to get a credit card and that was quickly maxed out and that's why I came to the UK so I can earn money to pay my debts, unfortunately it didn't happen this way...

Q: Why the UK, exactly?

A: Because of my friend, her Mum is a Doctor and her Dad was a diplomat, her brother got an English degree and she can speak English perfectly, things in Bulgaria were that bad that there was no work for her, so she came here, working in care homes.

### *Natural Meaning Units Referring to Work Experiences*

- Here for the money, not because she loves England
- Feels inferior
- If work in Bulgaria she wouldn't have left
- Lucky to find employers close-by
- Appreciation for a friend who helped her
- Not getting paid [in Bulgaria]
- Came to the UK to earn money and pay-off debts
- The UK [chosen] because of her friend
- Things in Bulgaria [are] bad – no work

### *'Meaning Condensation' of Themes and Structures*

I am here for the money [TEXTURAL MEANING]. Not because I love England, but for the money and to pay off my debts in Bulgaria. I wouldn't be here if there were opportunities in Bulgaria. Before I came over I hadn't been paid in my job as a paint shop assistant for about 6 months. My friend [STRUCTURE] gave me a hand initially and said there was a lot of care work here. Her Mum is a Doctor and her Dad a retired Diplomat, but despite that she is here working as a Carer.

The choice of this approach had a number of implications for the overview of findings in the next chapter. First, it presented the need to only include those themes which were representatives of all workers narratives, thus placing the onus on presenting only the essential characteristics of the precariousness 'whole', while excluding thematic 'parts' which were significant for an individual, but not shared by other participants. Second, it required me to construct those essential characteristics with reference to both key themes, as well as key structures and contexts, within which the precarious experiences in the narratives occur. Yet, whilst all narratives could be analysed for key themes, not all workers discussed the contexts against which their own precariousness was constructed. Nevertheless, the iterative nature of the meaning condensation analysis enabled me to 'sense-check' key themes and structures discussed in interviews with subsequent participants and thus attain a degree of narrative validation. This, however, led me to include only those narratives, which could offer both a 'textual' and 'structural' insight into the meaning of the precarious work, and were representative of the precariousness 'whole'.

### *Summary*

The purpose of this chapter was to connect the theoretical framing of the precarious experience with the strategy for empirical investigation, by mapping both stages of the

study to a phenomenological paradigm of inquiry. The discussion sought to provide a golden thread between the theoretical models of earlier chapters and the philosophical, methodological and analytical approaches through which those theoretical models are to be applied in interview research.

In Chapter 4 I framed the precarious experience as a subjective phenomenon occurring within the objective context of low-pay, low-skill and low-tenure work. This subjectivity left room for individual differentiation, moderated by individual and social identities, and not an absolute, structurally determined manifestation of insecurity. This complexity extended the inherent ambiguity of the 'precarity' term and presented a challenge to its successful operationalisation in interview questions. The option of assuming that precarity was manifested as insecurity and using the latter as a more familiar, everyday term was, however, rejected. Although able to overcome the issue with defining precarity for interview participants, it diverged from this study's conceptualisation of the term as a broad range of experiences whose meaning was to be obtained from the workers themselves.

Grounding the study into the phenomenological paradigm of inquiry in this chapter offered a suitable alternative on a number of levels. First, it suggested a return to 'the matters themselves', thus removing the need for any pre-conceived limitations and structures on the precarious experience and leaving participants with the freedom to construct their own experiences through their own 'sense-making', even to re-construct them away from social expectations. Second, it offered a flexible philosophical worldview which is able to incorporate the precarious experience in its phenomenological richness, that is, not simply as an experience of immediate and present working conditions but past experiences and future expectations. This provided the third aspect of utility, namely, the 'triangulation' of precarious experiences

and acquisition of as many perspectives, as possible. In line with this, I approached migrants, care workers and commercial and hospitality employees as the typical precarious workers. I also sampled a local government and a CIPD group with the purpose of obtaining contrasting narratives to those of the precarious workers.

The purpose behind this sampling strategy was not to generalise but understand, as I have also adopted a qualitative methodology and a semi-structured interviewing method which fit well with the overarching phenomenological paradigm. It is also mapped to an interpretivist ontological and constructivist epistemological framework, which underscored my own proximity to participants, who became co-researchers, rather than research subjects.

Seeking to preserve the golden thread which links the theoretical constructions, paradigm and methodology of the study, I ultimately rejected Grounded Theory as a method of analysis, preferring to utilise a phenomenological approach to interview analysis, that of 'meaning condensation' which I demonstrated in this chapter. Consequently, having carried-out the interviews and analysed worker narratives, I now discuss key findings in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 6: OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

In Chapter 6 I present key findings from interviews with the ‘typical’ and ‘contrasting’ groups described in the previous chapter. Through this I seek to accommodate the rich descriptions of experiences, beliefs and attitudes associated with the ‘intending’ of precariousness by workers in low-skill, low-pay roles.

The overview of groups in this chapter follows the order already established in Chapter 5. Therefore, I begin with the ‘typical’ cases group and present findings from the migrant, care, and commercial and hospitality groups. In turn, those narratives are triangulated with the ‘contrasting’ cases interviews and, specifically, findings from the ‘local government’ and ‘CIPD’ groups.

The identification of the individual ‘parts’ of the precarious experience across participant groups, therefore, constitutes the early stages of the ‘meaning condensation’ analysis. Although I commence this analysis in Chapter 6, I do not complete it until Chapter 7, which summarises the key themes running across the ‘whole’ of the precariousness phenomenon.

### *Typical Case Findings - TC1: Migrant Group*

Despite conceptualisations in the literature, the predominant theme in the migrant group was neither that of worker insecurity, nor the commodification of alienation which Marxist discourses propose (Standing, 2011; Mészáros, 1986). A case in point is Alexey who, now in his third year in Britain, worked as a mechanic in a friend’s garage during the day and delivered Chinese take-away meals at night. Neither of his jobs offered Alexey a formal contract of employment. He received casual pay whenever there were garage customers, and £1 for each take-away delivery he made. In return for driving the take-away owner to and from work, Alexey was sometimes

offered a free, evening meal. Despite the precarious conditions in which he worked, Alexey did not view his working experiences in negative terms, nor adopted an instrumental attitude towards work:

“I am not here for the money. I could earn more in six months doing seasonal work in Bulgaria that I earned over the past year over here. It is the whole experience, I feel safe here. I don't have to worry about politics, as everything is sorted. People are tolerant. But, in Bulgaria, as soon as you do the job for a customer in the garage, he [sic] pulls out the money and pays. Here, people come and ask me how much things cost, and even though I only charge a third or a quarter of what an English garage would charge, they still haggle. I tell them it's cheap but they still argue because I am foreign. I think some of them want me to work for free. “

(Alexey, Male, Mechanic and Take-away Delivery Driver)

Despite his low English proficiency, Alexey was not isolated but was able to participate in a 'social group' and obtain social and economic support from it, a theme which appears in migrant Evgeny's narrative below. The group consisted of people he had known in Bulgaria but Alexey was able to form new connections since arriving in Britain, too.

“I find work only through knowing people. If you are on your own, you die. I have friends who can help me, for example, I'm over in the UK because my friends suggested I come over and offered me work initially”

(Alexey, Male, Mechanic and Take-away Delivery Driver)

Although his 'social group' existed in a network of relationships with others in a similar position, and included both migrant and British clients, it did not lead to collective consciousness. Alexey differentiated his 'in-group' not only from British society in general, but other migrant groups with which he came into contact. Alexey made sure he 'followed the rules' but did not see himself as integrated in British society. This, however, was the result of personal choice, rather than external prevention. As

stipulated by SIT, membership in a 'social group' was likely to cause Alexey to overestimate the difference between his 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' which he came into contact with. In this case, not only was he unaware and disinterested in British society's opinion of him but mocked and disparaged it:

"There are a lot of unemployed people here because they don't want to work. When I do my delivery job after a day in the garage, the owner of the Chinese takeaway house asks me every time '*find me more people to help out, I need more people, I need more drivers*'.

I work hard and I follow the rules. But not everyone does. For example I had never seen so many drunk women before I came over here and I don't like it. I have had drunk people jump on my car bonnet while I was out on a delivery and waiting at the traffic lights.

(Alexey, Male, Mechanic and Take-away Delivery Driver)

Alexey re-constructed the negative impact of his precarity context by 'sense-making' (Weick, 1995) it in relation to his previous work and life experiences. This relational 'intending' (Sokolowski 2000) of precariousness did not prevent Alexey's awareness of his circumstances being less-than-perfect, yet enabled him to contextualise work against his individual life-history to date. Alexey's reference to being brought-up to work was expressed so matter-of-factly, that I ignored its significance until, as I show below, it became a recurring theme. Considered against the rest of my sample's narratives, therefore, Alexey's comment about 'working all day, every day' is brief not because it is personally insignificant, but because he assumed this practice to be fairly common and, thus, a given:

"I am very durable! I don't drink, I don't go out, I don't smoke and I don't look for any kind of entertainment. It's the kind of life I am used to, the way I have been brought-up. I am part of a large family and when we were kids our clothes were always tatty, because everybody worked from an early age. There would be a hot meal in the evening but during the day only bread was available. And you worked all day, every day."

(Alexey, Male, Mechanic and Take-away Delivery Driver)

Migrant Evgeny also placed importance on participating in, and being able to rely on the help of a 'social group'. Evgeny had been in Britain for two years, arriving here in search for a better life for himself and his family. Prior to this he had lived in Greece for 20 years, and was a successful building contractor. When work became increasingly hard to find, Evgeny contacted Greek friends in Liverpool and was told that there are numerous opportunities there. Deciding to try his luck in Britain but not wishing to live in the North, Evgeny chose the South West and travelled here alone with the intention to bring the rest of the family when fully settled. Despite not speaking any English and not having made any arrangements, his friends were able to put him in touch with contacts in the South West, and he found lodgings with them. Access to 'social group' support, thus, enabled him to find accommodation and work, but neither lived-up to the high hopes he had had:

"I lived with some people from Poland. They were gypsies who rented-out a room in a house. I paid something like £50-£60 per week and there were about four people in our room, two people sleeping in one bed. It wasn't very big, about nine square metres [about 100 square feet].

At one point, I was told that someone was looking for a painter and a decorator, so I arranged to look at the job. When I met him, he asked me how much I wanted for painting two rooms in his house, and I said I was only able to do one because of another job I was doing. I asked him how much he was willing to pay me for just one room. He said 'I will give you £500' so I said 'ok'. On the last day he gave me £200 and he said, 'have that, and when you do the second room, I'll pay you the rest'. I had no choice, I took the £200."

(Evgeny, Male, Self-employed Builder and Decorator)

This event had a deep impact on Evgeny who spoke of the mistrust he had developed since then. He still relied on his contacts for work, yet membership in the 'social group' had ceased to be meaningful. Although this did not quite amount to isolation, it did offer evidence of Evgeny beginning to 'sense-make' his surroundings as an individual,



rather than as a member of a 'social group'. This did not mean that the context had a deterministic impact on his precarious experiences. Evgeny's precariousness was negative but, like Alexey, he constructed it as such in individually-relative terms and with regards to what he expected, but did not find.

"I used to think that I will live in this beautiful clean house here [in Britain] and have barbecues in my back garden like I'd seen people do in the movies. But I am disappointed. Britain is dirty. Bins are overflowing everywhere. It is not what I expected at all. And what about the people you see in the street? You can't tell if they are men or women! You see men together, hand-in-hand, kissing! I don't want my boys growing-up exposed to that!"

(Evgeny, Male, Self-employed Builder and Decorator)

Care assistant Gergana's precarious experience was also negative in relation to what she expected life and work in Britain to be like. Gergana had been living in Britain for the past three years and had also decided to come to the South West because of having friends already working here. It is by relying on support from her 'social group' that she not only managed to find accommodation but also work as a care assistant. Gergana was very much aware of the stigma associated with this type of work, but it was in relation to the difference between expectation and reality that she constructed her negative precariousness.

"British people are rude and self-centred. We [Bulgarians] used to hear about how polite and cultured British people were, you know, gentlemen and the like, but it is all nonsense. When I go to the bank I feel they look down on me and thinking, 'oh, you are an Eastern European, you are here for the benefits'."

(Gergana, Female, Care Assistant)

Initially I regarded this as evidence of the alienation and anxiety which was deemed part of the negative experience of Standing's (2011) precariat 'nostalgics'. This, however, was not an example of precarity contexts structurally-determining the

negativity of precarious experiences. Gergana was not unhappy with her work, nor could recall an instance of a bank cashier or a colleague making specific comments to suggest 'ill-treatment' (Fevre et al., 2012). This was not an objective but, rather, a relational assessment, based on a benchmark of British behaviour Gergana had adopted and against which she assessed her surroundings. Furthermore, it was likely to carry the inherent bias of the abstract 'social group' of Bulgarians with which she identified herself. This was exemplified in adopting a Bulgarian label for her British job and which only her Bulgarian friends at home could understand.

"I can't say that I don't enjoy it [working in a care home], though, because I do. You have to, in order to be able to do the job, and when I say that I like my job, my Bulgarian friends often say to me: 'how can you enjoy wiping arses [sic]? When I was visiting home once someone asked me what I did over in the UK, so I just blurted out 'guzarka' [a pun on 'guz', meaning 'arse' and which, in Bulgarian, shares its root with the colloquial term for 'posh']. He asked me what I meant and I said, 'I am *guzarka*, I wipe arses [sic]'. He couldn't stop laughing for ages."

(Gergana, Female, Care Assistant)

Like Alexey, Gergana referred to the pedagogic impact which being brought-up to work had had on her. Almost appearing to apologise for her enjoyment of a job, which was not only low-pay and low-skill, but had unpalatable aspects, too she stated that, for her, the purpose of life was to work, regardless of the type of job:

"I am in my 60s now and am from an older generation where we go to work. This is something we do, it is our duty and our responsibility, and I fulfil it to the best of my ability."

(Gergana, Female, Care Assistant)

Earlier in the interview she had explained that she also had credit card debts in Bulgaria and her job here, despite being at the minimum wage, enabled her to make

repayments. This degree of instrumentality notwithstanding, however, suggested that her precariousness was moderated by her regarding work in pedagogic terms, not only as a personally developmental activity, but as a duty. I wondered what the role of being part of an 'older generation' was in Gergana's construction of precariousness, yet it was not so much a reference to her age but to a period of time in her native Bulgaria. Specifically, this was the time of Bulgarian Communist Party rule, which educated Gergana's generation in line with Marxist ideology, including that of the humanising role of work (compare, for example, with Mészáros, 1986; Marx, 1981).

The difference between expectations and reality was also strongly pronounced in the narrative of fish and chips shop-assistant Liliana, whom I interviewed alongside her husband Stanko. Stanko and Liliana had met in Britain with Stanko living in Britain for over six years, as opposed to Liliana's four. Liliana had come to Britain to obtain a degree and, having been made redundant from her job as an airport customer service officer, was working in a fish and chips shop. Liliana constructed her precariousness as negative not only in relation to her previous job but also what she expected of her life in Britain, and in comparison with what Liliana felt she deserved as a member of a graduate 'social group'. Her narrative was also the only example of all-negative precariousness in my group of migrant participants:

"It is not nice to spend three years to get a Bachelor's degree in Business from a UK University, not only that but to do it in a foreign language, which was very hard at the beginning, and then end-up working in a fish' n' chips shop! And the people who come to the shop are horrible, nasty people. Nasty people on benefits who come to the shop in their pyjamas, or in flip-flops or slippers. They stand at the counter counting their pennies for disgusting food.

I've lived in poor areas in Bulgaria and have never seen anything like this. When my Mum came to visit me, she couldn't believe it, people walking around not bothering to get dressed."

(Liliana, Female, Shop Assistant)

Liliana's husband, Stanko, was also a graduate. He had gained his Economics degree in Bulgaria, and had had his qualification verified and recognised in Britain with the purpose of using it to find work. The jobs he took, however, did not require a degree:

"[Since coming to Britain] I have worked in a meat factory, washing guts off the floor, in a Toshiba factory making batteries, in a Wrigley's factory making chewing gum, even did a few months at the Post Office, all temporary jobs. I have my Economics degree from Bulgaria which I have transferred here and which is fully recognised, but ended-up driving a taxi over here. I am self-employed, I like it, I just like life here. People follow the rules and there seems to be a degree of respect."

(Stanko, Male, Taxi Driver)

His positive precariousness was constructed in relation to his previous experiences in Bulgaria, which he felt could be summarised with one particular example. Although he was a taxi-driver and had encountered 'some interesting clients' he felt that life in Britain could not make him as 'tense' and 'edgy' as life in Bulgaria:

"When I lived in Bulgaria, I was in town with my Mum one day. We were crossing the street, at a pedestrian crossing, and this car nearly hit us. I shouted at the driver and, I don't know, I think I flipped him [an offensive gesture of raising the middle finger]. The guy stopped, got out of the car, opened the boot, pulled-out a baseball bat and started walking towards us! Just so it happened, a police car was driving past, so they saw him coming at us and immediately stopped him. After that experience I went out and bought myself a gas pistol and started carrying it with me. Just in case, you know?"

(Stanko, Male, Taxi Driver)

At the time of the interview Stanko was working as a Taxi Driver and had been doing so for about six months. He did not feel any resentment for the jobs he had to do in the past, nor constructed his precarious experiences in particularly negative terms. Unlike Liliana, he had no particular expectations of access to high-status jobs on account of being a graduate. Stanko also appeared to have a much more negative

benchmark of experience in his native Bulgaria than Liliana, in comparison to which 'washing guts off the floor' was not so bad. Also, whereas Liliana had come to the UK as an EU citizen (Bulgaria's accession to the EU taking place in 2007), Stanko and his 'social group' peers had experienced the difficulties of having to obtain a work permit, which had limited the type of work they could do. In turn, this led him to 'sense-make' his precariousness as one normal for a member of his 'social group'.

Like Stanko, Spanish waitress Celeste's experiences were influenced not by the precarity context in which she had found herself, but her 'social group'. Not only did Celeste's role as a waitress offer only minimum pay, but she found herself working long-hours, often in contravention of the working-time directive. To add insult to injury, the owner of the South West restaurant where she worked insisted that all gratuities were brought to him, and he took a percentage. Celeste had brought her payslips to the interview and was keen to show me how frequently she had worked over 70 hours a week. At the time of the interview she had just handed-in her notice and was about to start a new restaurant job which paid better and offered shorter working hours:

"I was on a zero-hour contract and getting paid minimum wage. Because of my degree and my dedication, the owner made me the Restaurant Manager. I was responsible for wine and food product purchases and had to manage a team of three people. My wages didn't go up massively, though – I was paid the minimum wage.

And the owner was so strict. One day I got there at nine in the morning and finished at three in the morning on the next day. That day I had no break, because it was a really busy day. We have cameras in the restaurant, and the owner checks the cameras every single minute, he has the cameras in his house on his TV, too. So, at 3 am, I was really tired, so I took a piece of cheesecake from the freezer and had it. The next day he asked me to pay for the cheesecake."

(Celeste, Female, Waitress)

Rather than feeling relieved to leave her precarious conditions behind, however, Celeste was thinking of withdrawing her notice. She re-constructed her experience in positive terms by referring to the camaraderie of her 'social group' which made working there 'fun', despite the long working hours and low pay. The cohesion of her group was enhanced by the presence of the restaurant owner as the Other, against which Celeste's group distinguished itself. It was a Spanish restaurant and although the 'social group' consisted mainly of Spanish staff, the owner was British. Like migrant Gergana, Celeste's group asserted its own identity in rejection of the immediate context of work and through the use of a native term:

"We started calling him 'amo' to his face. He is English and doesn't know that this is a very rude Spanish word which means slave driver"

(Celeste, Female, Waitress)

The significance of the 'social group' in re-constructing the context of work 'was expressed strongly in the narratives of Bulgarian couple Ivan and Maria, also. Both had come to Britain prior to Bulgaria's accession to the EU and lived in London for nine years. At the time of the interview Ivan, Maria and their 10-year-old son had been living in the South West for over a year:

"There are some jobs foreign workers will do abroad that they wouldn't do at home. For example I would be happy to be a road sweeper here, where no one knows me. I can't imagine doing it in Bulgaria, where I would have people I know and even relatives coming over to me to ask why I had taken-up this job or worse, to spit their chewing gum over a bit of pavement I had just swept!"

(Maria, Female, Self-employed Cleaner)

For Maria, the context of precarity seemed to matter only in relation to the person's position in a 'social group'. While cleaning was no easier in Britain, than in Bulgaria, there was no danger of losing her social status through being rejected by her 'social

group'. Therefore, for Maria, precariousness was not an absolute experience but one which could be moderated by protecting her group status. In Britain, therefore, she felt she was free to re-construct her experience in individual terms, away from the objective context of work and in relation to her personal outlook:

"I was very unhappy and unfulfilled with my job. Then one day I realised that I am earning money, and have a job which allows me to travel. I am never in the same place, I have no boss to answer to. After I realised that, I stopped moaning. I think I would find a way to make myself happy because for me work is pleasant. Happiness doesn't happen overnight, it happens gradually and you have to work at it."

(Maria, Female, Self-employed Cleaner)

Maria had, seemingly, started to construct her precariousness in instrumental terms as a means to an end, and had become commodified. Yet, in Mészáros' (1986) use commodification was using work to earn the means through which to seek fulfilment outside of work. This, however, was not the case with Maria for whom work was both 'pleasant', and a means to be self-sufficient.

Ivan, who had not spoken until to this point, shook his head after Maria had made the above statement and explained that this was not the case for him. Ivan left his well-paid, high-skilled job as a technical designer in Bulgaria because he had got 'bored' with it. He started work as a builder and gradually acquired the skills to start his own business in London. Relying on his 'social group' contacts, he was able to find similar work in the South West after the family moved, yet work did not fulfil him, nor had an inherent, personally-significant meaning:

"I am not happy with the work I do. I do it because I can't think of anything else to do, I can't think of a job that will give me job satisfaction, and the income I would like. I do get a sense a satisfaction when I see the finished product but it is brief."

(Ivan, Male, Self-employed Builder)

In trying to understand the construction of Ivan's precariousness I decided that, unlike Maria, he was experiencing commodification. This was so, on account of Ivan regarding work and personal satisfaction as inherently separate and irreconcilable. Nevertheless, this did not lead to an altogether negative precarious experience. Ivan was not a 'grinner' (Standing, 2011) but neither was he insecure, nor inherently unhappy with his work, which did bring him some satisfaction. However, this sense of satisfaction was not enough to make him happy in wider, existential terms. His precarious working position and his private life were separate.

In constructing his experience, however, Ivan agreed that both he and Maria had parental responsibility to give a good example to their son and bring him up to appreciate the importance of work. Ivan nodded when Maria talked about work being an important part of their up-bringing, which they both had a duty of passing on their son:

"Maria: He [their son] asked me where the money in our bank account comes from and I said, 'I go to work. You don't get money if you don't work'. So I took him in to clean with me and he was helping, and he said to me, 'how much do you earn for this?'. I said, 'guess', and he said, '£100 a day'. I said, 'not that much, try again', and he said, '£60' and I said, 'less', and he said, 'so little!'. I said, 'what I do, is worth the money'. Our parents always worked and never took time off, whether because they were sick or anything else!"

(Maria, Female, Self-employed Cleaner)

Initially, it seemed that Maria was constructing a sense of 'false consciousness' in order to present her poorly-remunerated and low-skill job as meaningful and having an inherent worth. This seemed to be the case especially in the context of her son suggesting that she does not get paid very much. Explaining to him that even so, the



job is worth it, thus, offered her a way out of the situation without losing face. Taking the example of her working history, however, I find this unlikely. Maria had already spoken openly of her dissatisfaction with previous positions, including that as a shop manager in London. She, furthermore, discussed her difficulties in sacrificing her ambitions and aspirations while being a stay-at-home Mum when their son was born. I, therefore, believe that this position, low-skill and low-pay though it was, really did give her a sense of freedom and fulfilment albeit in a slow, gradual way in which the separation between Maria and the job diminished and she started identifying herself with the job. This, therefore, was not 'false consciousness' but a defence of the inherent worth of a precarious work which she regarded as an important pedagogic activity.

#### *TC2: Care Group*

The theme of precarious experiences having a pedagogic quality was, also, prominent in the next, 'typical' group, that of nursery and adult care assistants. Here, care workers spoke of the positive impact which their low-skill, low-pay roles had on them as individuals. Once again, those narratives went beyond the veneer of 'false consciousness' and discussed the changes taking places in the workers themselves, and specifically, their self-esteem and confidence:

"This is more than a job and I would struggle to leave [if I had to]. I suppose I have become more confident in it, too. I used to be shy and quiet and would never have done an interview like this. This [job] is so much more responsible than working in an office. In an office, I could pull a sickie at any time but here people depend on you!"

(Cath, Female, Part-qualified Nursery Assistant)

The positive evaluation of Cath's professional 'in-group' was also visible in the narrative, and expressed through her bias against other groups, even ones which may be deemed to have a higher, 'white collar' status. As also exemplified in Susan's narrative, the evaluation of the precarious context was not objective and impartial. Once again, workers could re-construct their precarious experiences in relation to their previous working history:

"My last job was in a supermarket and it was really unfulfilling for me personally. I was ready to leave within 3 months, if found a job. Here, it is different. It is a family. We are all here to make a difference, we all enjoy what we are doing. I can say that I have matured a lot working here."

(Susan, Female, Care Assistant)

The sense of pride on account of personal growth came across in both of the above quotes and, in Susan's case, is intertwined with the construction of the precarious experience in a more profound sense, that is, as being part of a 'family'. The family notion appeared quite frequently both in the 'care' and the 'commercial and hospitality' group and seemed to identify an experience of not only identifying with a 'social group', but also 'internalising' its values and beliefs (see, for example, Ashforth and Mael, 1989). In addition, this was an indication that the boundaries between those workers' private and professional lives were blurred, as per Standing's (2011) notion of 'tertiarisation'. Yet, rather than resulting in insecurity, commodification or social alienation (compare with Antunes, 2013), it provided meaningful and fulfilling membership to a 'social group'.

This group was an 'out-group' in a social sense and care group participants were aware of the stigma which society attached to their type of work. Care assistant Josh,

for instance, was acutely aware of the ‘bum-wiping’ connotations migrant Gergana had already spoken about:

“People think that if you’re a care worker you wipe bums for a career, but I am here to make lives better. Yes, there are some...physical...aspects of the job but there is so much more. I have done more activities with the guys [residents] here, than I have done throughout my whole career in care, or support work, as I call it. Once we are out in the community and off doing stuff, it’s not really caring I’m supporting them to fulfil their satisfactions. I don’t tell people I work in care. I tell them I am a support worker and yet, when they ask what that entails and I explain they just smile and go, ‘so you wipe bums’

(Josh, Male, Care Assistant)

This was an important perspective and warranted careful consideration on my part. First, this was an instance of a ‘social change’ strategy through which Josh achieved a positive comparison between his ‘in-group’ and those outside it by using alternative criteria. In turn, this enabled him to find meaning and assert the dignity of his role in line with the ‘social change’ strategy through which ‘social group’ members can compare it positively with ‘out-groups’. Thus, the overall feeling was not of Josh’s defensiveness or attempt to seek ‘social mobility’ out of a precarious ‘out-group’, but challenge the position of the ‘out-group’ vis-à-vis social perceptions and within society as a whole. Second, Josh was aware of negative social perceptions, yet this did not diminish the enjoyment of work and, if anything, provided an ‘us’ and ‘them’ context which strengthened his sense of belonging and cohesion into the group. The relational aspect of the precarious experience was also touched upon, and Josh constructed his previous experiences as not only fulfilling in themselves, but also in relation to previous care homes he had worked in. Lastly, like the nursery assistants above, Josh regarded his precarious job as a pedagogic experience:

“I think it’s [the job] amazing, the support and the job satisfaction I get out of it, and being able to go home knowing that I have made someone else’s day

better, makes me feel better about myself. The atmosphere here is much, much better than other care homes I have worked at. I have become so confident. I know that without my support the guys might not have got the day they wanted to have. Doing stuff with the guys [residents] is fun. We're enjoying as much as what they are enjoying, we are getting the job satisfaction as well and really enjoying ourselves, but they are included, so they are getting social inclusion at the same time, instead of social exclusion."

(Josh, Male, Care Assistant)

The 'family' theme, underscoring 'internalisation' of the 'social group's' values and ethos moderated precariousness of nursery assistant Rebecca, also:

"In this job, I feel like I am part of something. I always say to 'Dorothy' [nursery manager], 'this is like my second family', because we all get on so well, I've gained so much confidence and making friendships as well, made some really good friends"

(Rebecca, Female, Fully-qualified Nursery Assistant)

Part-qualified nursery assistant Gemma provided another example of how the blurring of the professional-private sphere boundary in her own precarious experience did not lead to insecurity and alienation. Rather, it provided her with a sense of social support from her group (compare with McGuire, 2007):

"I know they [her colleagues] are always there for me if I needed them, for example when my husband was taken in to hospital, I was supposed to meet one of the girls and I didn't and I told her, and she offered to come and look after the children, and it's nice to have that!"

(Gemma, Part-qualified Nursery Assistant)

Participants in the care group also discussed the pedagogic impact of their precarious jobs. Similar to migrants Gergana and Maria, both nursery and care assistance spoke of their duty to lead by example:

“Whilst I was off work and taking my girl for a walk, we saw a lady in a suit getting in her car. My girl asked what the lady was doing and I told her she was going to work. My little girl was so surprised that ‘mommies go to work, too’. I did go back to work and feel I was lucky to find myself again.”

(Joanna, Female, Fully-qualified Nursery Assistant)

Although precarious, Joanna’s care work position provided her with a professional social identity through which to improve self-esteem and develop her self-concept as a professional. This was significant not only for her as a person, but also for her as a role-model to her daughter. This was also the case with Leanne who, despite having a number of precarious experiences and suffering work-related injuries enjoyed her job. Work enabled Leanne to role-model positive behaviour, and to protect her daughter from the experiences of Leanne’s own childhood:

“My Dad was an alcoholic so when my Mum was at work and I was off school, Dad would always take me down to the pub so I spent a lot of time there. I wanted to protect my daughter from this. I wanted her to have the life I didn’t and set the right example. This job is tough. I have had a resident punch me in the face and cracked my cheek. I have had my coccyx broken. I keep doing the job because I love what I do. You can’t fake it. You can try but the residents will pick-up on it and it is not fair on them.”

(Leanne, Female, Care Assistant)

Precariousness was expressed as a relational experience in the narratives of the care group, also, as exemplified in Dana’s narrative below. Like migrants Liliana and Evgeny, Dana had certain experiences and expectations of her job and found them unfulfilled. Her precariousness, therefore, was negative on account of the context, yet not the objective contexts of terms, conditions and legislation as such, but the aspirational benchmark Dana had adopted:

“When you go into a job, you go in with your ideals of what the job is going to be, and once you get into the job, you then realise all the other things that go with it. For example, I think that it [the purpose of the job] should be all about

the children. I think nursery should be about teaching children how to interact and behave with other children, to be full of care and concern. Does it really matter if they can do all this stuff? Do we need to know that somebody can use the potty? But the Government is putting pressure on us to do all these extra things, all this extra paperwork...”

(Dana, Female, Part-qualified Nursery Assistant)

In Dana’s case, the negative precariousness was shaped by her inability to reconcile her expectation of what the job should be, and ought to be about, with the reality she encountered. Dana, furthermore, did not make any references to a ‘social group, which suggested that she was ‘intending’ her context as an individual, rather than re-constructing it through ‘social group’ membership. Dana shared the same low-pay and low-skill with the other nursery assistants and was part of the same group, yet in her individual instance, this did not give rise to positive precarious experiences.

Similarly, nursery assistant Sandra’s precarious experiences were not constructed in positive terms, despite sharing a similar context with colleagues, who experienced positive precariousness. Sandra showed signs of commodification in a true Marxist sense and spoke of her present job as a Nursery Assistant in instrumental terms, as a means to an end. Her narrative appeared to display a separation and distancing between her private and professional spheres, as in the case of migrant Ivan, above:

“I’m here for my job, to pay the bills, nothing else really. As I say to the girls [colleagues] in my room [the nursery is divided into ‘rooms’ based on the age group of the children], ‘I’m not here to make friendships.’ So, whether we form a friendship or not, it doesn’t really bother me. I don’t live for the Nursery and I won’t really put the job first.”

(Sandra, Female, Fully-qualified Nursery Assistant)

This instrumental attitude was also present in nursery assistant Liz’s narrative, where she spoke of work as a source of income through which she, as a single mother, could

provide for her family. The job did not seem to be a source of meaningful experience but a means of addressing a financial need:

“You don’t have a choice. You have to work, unless you’ve got a disability or you’ve got a child under five or you’re a carer, you have to work. I can either stay at home and have no money or go to work and have money. That’s what you’ve got to do. Because if you don’t, you won’t get any money.”

(Liz, Female, Part-qualified Nursery Assistant)

I asked Sandra and Liz whether they enjoyed what they did and whether they had considered doing anything else. Like Ivan, both enjoyed seeing the children grow and develop, and Sandra spoke of feeling ‘sad’ when her group of children left nursery to start school. Those, however, appeared to be experiences circumscribed to the sphere of work and were neither a source of existential fulfilment, nor necessarily added to the development of their self-concepts. Both took pride in their work but were not, necessarily, proud of the work they did.

### *TC3: Commercial and Hospitality Group*

The above nursery assistants’ narrative reminded that while there was scope for workers to reconstruct the negative impact of their precarity contexts, the context themselves remained objectively precarious. There was, also, little scope for my participants to change their precarious circumstances through individual or collective resistance. In line with this, I found no evidence for workers organising themselves against a common ‘enemy’ in the name of the shared goal of ending their socio-economic subordination. The absence of organisation and resistance by workers in subordinate conditions was particularly notable in the narratives of Cleanwell workers, part of the commercial and hospitality group. As a large international employer, Cleanwell offered a complex context, against which both positive and negative

experiences could occur. At the latter end of the spectrum, those could be the experiences of workers who were not only unable to resist and change their context of work, but felt their supervisors and managers did not listen to their views with regards to day-to-day issues.

“Participant 1, Female, Cleaner: Why aren’t they [Cleanwell] listening to us? They make changes, for example in the cleaning products we use. We tell them the new product doesn’t work, or worse, is damaging to the surface we are cleaning but nothing. How can they make a decision about what we do at ground level and not consult us? I guess they don’t know what ground level is!

Participant 4, Male, Cleaner: As long as their KPIs [key performance indicators] look good, that’s all that matters. We can get our on-site supervisors to look at the problem, but as soon as it leaves Cleanwell and goes up the line, it is forgotten.”

(Cleanwell Focus Group # 1)

The lack of employee ‘voice’ was, thus, promulgated not just on account of the inaccessibility of the Cleanwell Head Office, which was not in the South West and which could only be reached through a bureaucratic chain of command. Workers also felt that their own supervisors and managers were not always reachable:

“Participant 3, Male, Cleaner: We get no choice because Cleanwell have got it set down what they are looking for...and what are you going to do? There isn’t a lot of jobs going around and Cleanwell are the biggest employer!”

(Cleanwell Focus Group # 4)

There were other instances in Focus Group # 3:

“Participant 1, Male, Cleaner: There is very little transparency between the staff and the management

Participant 5. Female, Cleaner: It’s the hierarchy!”

“Participant 1, Male, Cleaner: We have pointless meetings when something is announced but nothing is followed through. You get dragged to a meeting about something, which they [managers] can’t really tell you anything about and everyone’s routine is thrown out of play, which pisses people off. A phrase you could use is ‘premature ejaculation’ because you get a lot of talk about



something but nothing happens. It is like the Loch Ness Monster which everyone keeps going on about, it but you doubt it exists...

(Cleanwell Focus Group # 3)

This presented a context where employees often had to comply with new decisions and practises without always having any information before hand to make an informed judgement about impact on personal day-to-day duties. Even when there was the promise of change, following worker feedback, the outcome was often veiled in uncertainty and like the 'Loch Ness Monster', improvements failed to materialise. However, this context of commodification and precarity did not automatically turn workers into insecure victims of circumstance. Even when there was little scope to change the actual context, workers could re-construct their precarious experiences and rationalise the context in such a way as to allow enjoyment of the actual job in hand. Cleanwell workers did this through their 'social groups', the internal cohesion of which was improved by the presence of differentiated 'out-groups' comprising of managers. Worker 'social groups' were formed with varying abstraction and Cleanwell employees considered their military personnel clients to be equal members. This, once again, was an example of a 'social change' strategy which, in accordance with SIT, workers could apply and evaluate their 'social group' through alternative criteria. In the absence of 'social mobility' options, the 'social change' strategy enabled workers to view their 'social groups' with positive bias on account of the opportunity to work with, and support members of the military.

"Participant 3, Male, Cleaner: There is camaraderie on this site within the forces that we are in. We are part of them as well, and there is something about working here and being part of their team..."

Participant 5, Female, Caterer: ...you see on the news some of things the Forces go through and what they are doing for our country, so when you are working in place like this you feel proud that you are doing your bit, too!

Participant 1, Male, Cleaner: The Forces guys very rarely refer to us as 'the cleaner' they will call us by name if they know us, and will say that the first person they miss is the cleaner!

(Cleanwell Focus Group # 4)

As the interviews with Cleanwell workers progressed, I was able to observed 'social groups' which contained members of the managerial team, also. Those were instances not only of managerial support but, once again, positive descriptions of the precarious experience as being akin to that of a 'family':

"Participant 3, Female, Cleaner: They're not colleagues they are friends. I couldn't survive without them. This lady here [points to participant next to her] I have known all my life!

Participant 1, Male, Cleaner: We are like a little extended family, we can speak to our bosses easily, you can relate to them.

Participant 5, Female, Cleaner: They [Cleanwell] do give you training and you can go up the ladder. You are given opportunities to develop yourself.

Participant 1, Male, Cleaner: We are lucky because staff here are supportive of each other as well, we have become a family and help each other out with problems."

(Cleanwell Focus Group # 2)

It also appeared that workers were not always ignored by their managers, nor were managers always remote and unwilling to notice workers, or help:

"Participant 6, Male, Cleaner: The rules are set out and if you don't abide by them you know what's going to happen! But they always take the friendly approach first, if things aren't going right for the client or the company. It's a friendly chat first.

Participant 3, Male, Cleaner: Yes, there is the clear direction, often you can sort things out if you actually spoke to them [Cleanwell]. I know people who think about leaving the job because their trousers are too tight!

Participant 1, Male, Cleaner: I don't know, I enjoy the job, else I wouldn't be here!

Participant 5, Female, Cleaner: I enjoy it working here; this is one of the best jobs I have had!"

(Cleanwell Focus Group # 4)

Cleanwell employees' ability to re-construct their precariousness as a positive experience and their participation of 'social groups' did not, however, mean that groups were coming together, or forming collective consciousness. In turn, the intra-group cohesion of each 'social group' did not engender employee solidarity towards colleagues at the South West site, let alone the wider Cleanwell collective. Group members could, thus, differentiate themselves by regarding managers as belonging to a unified and undifferentiated category (compare with Miller and Brewer, 1984). They could, also separate themselves by individual members of the 'in-group'. This was a subjective assessment which could be based on the difference between espoused values:

"Participant 5, Female, Cleaner: We are expected to do our job and cover for people whose work is not to the same standard, but that's some people's ethos. Personally, I'd get rid of them.

Participant 1, Female, Cleaner: Some people are not pulling their weight but Cleanwell can't get rid of them because of HR policy.

(Cleanwell Focus Group # 1)

It could, also, be formed on the basis of perceived incompatibility of attitudes and personalities, which enabled workers to retain scope for 'interpersonal' behaviour within a 'social group' (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). This, once again, pointed to the individualised nature of the precarious experiences which was neither determined by the presence of a precarity context, nor collectivise through membership to a 'social group'.

The existence of both positive and negative precariousness at Cleanwell initially seemed paradoxical, and posed a challenge to my understanding of worker experiences there. It appeared that workers were often unhappy, because rules and policies were applied inconsistently across the board at the South West site. When this occurred, workers felt it amounted to favouritism. They could, however, be equally unhappy when policies were uniformly applied across the board and, when this happened; workers felt they were not listened to, nor their individual circumstances taken into account. Some workers were unhappy with Cleanwell taking little interest into their day-to-day affairs and preferred to side with the military. Others were fed-up with Cleanwell's constant interference into their work and the frequent meetings and training activities Cleanwell employees were expected to attend. For most, work was enjoyable yet, while some enjoyed the company of the colleagues around them and felt meaningful membership into a 'social group', others were disparaging of their colleagues' lack of effort or reliance on benefits.

In considering the range of positive and negative experiences against the context of other interviews, I came to the understanding, that the paradox was only apparent and present if precariousness was regarded as a collective experience. Once the 'collective' denominator was removed, precariousness became a relational phenomenon, 'sense-made' against personal histories, both working and personal experience. Although manifest in a shared context, the variations I observed were steeped in individuality, and against the personal 'benchmarks' each worker brought with him or her, to the common precarity setting.

The small number of hospitality interviews further illustrated the individual essence of precariousness. Waiter Zac's enjoyment of the job was, thus, constructed through his

fulfilling position within a 'social group' of colleagues, on account of which he was biased even against white-collar 'out-groups':

"Everybody is funny and you go a bit crazy. It's fun because of the people you are working with. We've got our families but we come to work and we've got our second dysfunctional family here! I can't imagine myself working in an office, for example, I'd be so bored and clock-watching all day."

(Zac, Male, Waiter)

### *Contrasting Case Findings CC1: Local Government Group*

The impact of the 'social group' and tendency to re-construct precariousness in relation to personal expectations was, surprisingly, also manifest in the experiences of the Local Government group, despite it being selected as a contrasting group. As it transpired however, some members of the contrasting group had had precarious experiences in their current context. Although my participants were permanent employees in senior positions, the local authority for which they worked had undergone a process of restructure prior to the interviews taking place. During this period their positions were placed at risk of redundancy, and my participants faced the possibility of becoming unemployed. It appeared that the present security of their employment circumstances had not diminished the memory of their precarious experiences. The resulting precariousness was negative, and constructed as such in relation to their expectations of what working for a local authority would be like in terms of organisational, and 'social group' behaviour.

As an example, HR consultant Sheila spoke of her disappointment in the lack of organisational support she experienced. Although Sheila had felt she would be able to handle such work precarity, the experience was more unsettling and upsetting than she expected it to be. The component parts of the experience, once again, pointed to

the ability of the 'social group' to add meaning and support within a context of work. However, this was contingent on individual participation in a group and, since Sheila increasingly became aware of a lack of fit between her and the group's values, she disassociated herself from her colleagues and stopped interacting with them. The discrepancy between her expectations and the reality of precarity added to the absence of social support from her group and made for an increasingly negative experience.

"I have experience of all levels of HR and was confident I can get another job without too much of a problem. I even started looking forward to the prospect of change.

Nothing prepared me for the actual event. I lost sleep over 2-3 weeks, it's affected my concentration at work. I was getting no support, no time off to complete my job-application.

My colleagues went into a real 'compete mode'. They were verbally wrestling with each other and talking about each other behind each other's backs. I made an early decision not be like that. I did isolate myself from other people because I couldn't deal with how they were behaving.

I think work is ordinarily something quite far removed from your home, the connections between work at home is that work pays the bills, fundamentally. And yes, you like to be happy in your work because that makes the balance right but when something so fundamental happens at work it threatens you home life as well"

(Sheila, Female, HR Consultant)

A negative assessment of the working reality in relation to individual expectations was also present in HR officer Trevor's narrative. Trevor singled-out the lack of 'social group' support despite his expectations to the contrary as a particularly vexing aspect of his negative experience:

"That's what is bothering me the most, when I was at my former employer's, you'd think, '[it was] a massive private organisation, so they could treat people like crap, because it's all about profit and has to be about profit', but it was so

open and transparent there, you wouldn't believe it. Then you come in to the public sector and it should be open and transparent, and it is not, it is corrupt!

I absolutely love the work, that's not an issue in the slightest, but seeing colleagues in tears and colleagues having to leave the organisation and nothing being done about the problem [is an issue].

I am currently off work, I stopped work on Thursday and I just wrote an email saying, that I can't work within an organisation that I don't trust and I'm paranoid and I am not sleeping and that is not like me I have never had more than 2 days off in my life, I had panic attacks, anxiety, sleep problems, when I was writing the email I was physically shaking."

(Trevor, Male, HR Officer)

Trevor's expectation of what public sector work would be was neither met, nor was there any apparent source of support during the period of change, with members of his 'social group' either leaving the organisation or going on sick-leave. When I met with him, Trevor felt that 'going-off sick' was the only option available to him at the moment also, so had been signed off work by his GP. I was struck by the powerful depictions of the precarious experience in Trevor and Sheila's narratives, which seemed to share the common themes of relational assessment and loss of 'social group' support, both from peers and managers. The environment of change did not, however, have to usher in negative experiences. Admin officer Emma's narrative was, consequently, an example of a worker re-constructing her precariousness of insecure work (made insecure through the threat of redundancy, rather than inherently so) on account of the pedagogic impact of precarity:

"I will come out of it the other side and I will know where I stand and what I want to do, I won't let it beat me, or get me down because life is too short. In the very beginning it [threat of redundancy] was annoying and it made me angry. I have had to grow and become something different, and it shows how flexible I can be so it doesn't worry me having to find work because I am a flexible and adaptable person and I always have been. This has actually allowed me to grow and develop transferable skills."

(Emma, Female, Admin Officer)

It seemed that Sheila and Emma's narratives were mirror images of the same context of change and precarity. However, whereas Sheila found her preparation insufficient and was struck with the realisation that the separation between her professional and private sphere did not exist, Emma moved in the opposite direction. Having identified herself with her job for a number of years, Emma seemed to move away from her particular role and put distance between herself and her employer. With her self-concept no longer circumscribed to her job, Emma felt she had the skills to move on and survive the period of change. Even though, like Sheila and Trevor, precarity was imposed on her, she was able to move from negative, to positive precariousness.

Further examples of precariousness affected by the 'social group' and re-constructed in relation to previous experiences were provided by the local government focus group. In those cases, the construction of precariousness could lead to a separation between the worker and work.

Participant 1, Female, HR Officer: The first restructure really affected me. I was absolutely terrified, fresh out of college, in this safe, secure little team and I remember crying! I was thinking, 'what is my job going to be, will I have a job, will they like me?' With the last one, even though I knew my area will be affected, I thought, 'if I have a job, I have a job if not -it is not the end of the world!'

Participant 3, Female, Policy Officer: I am less engaged than in the past, getting closer to the end of my career than the start, and I have been through so many redundancies in the last 25 years...When I have gone [lost my job], or my husband has, we have moved on and it all works-out!

Participant 4, Male, HR Officer: It definitely makes you less engaged. I have been through multiple periods of change, stability, change, stability, change, I have done all the hours, worked my socks off and in the end it didn't make any difference. They will fudge it, make me redundant and funnily enough the job gets recreated, so the job was not redundant, so it was only a short term saving!



So what's the point of me killing myself when it's not going to make a blind bit of difference?

(Local Government Focus Group)

### *CC2: CIPD Group*

The significance of the 'social group' as a moderator of worker experience was not limited to participants in the typical case groups of my sample. This reminded me of the overarching utility of SIT to address identity-formative experiences, of which work was a significant one, through recourse to the 'social group'. The CIPD group also made reference to the importance of the 'social group' which could consist not only of colleagues, managers and clients, but also parents and siblings. In those cases personal experiences of work were evaluated against the benchmark of the 'social groups', rather than through objective and balanced assessment. The pedagogic significance of a working ethos which was passed from parents to children was also brought-up in the narratives below. Work had retained its significance as a pedagogic and humanising activity (see, for example, Mészáros, 1986; Arendt, 1954). While ordinarily manifest in non-precarious environments, this significance seemed to have been preserved in precarious contexts, also.

"Participant 1, Male, Business Manager: I want my children to see that if you work hard you can succeed. I was always expected to work, to pay my way. So even though I didn't do well at school and didn't go to University, I was expected to work.

Participant 5, Female, HR Officer: My Mum always said that as long as I was happy, it was fine. I did want to prove I was brainy...

Participant 7, Female, Admin Officer: I think it can happen with siblings as well, if your brother or sister is doing really well you don't want to be the one that's rubbish!"

(CIPD Focus Group)

## *Summary*

In Chapter 6 I presented findings from my investigation into the precarious experiences of three 'typical' cases groups and contrast them against two non-precarious groups of employees. I approached the former group through individual interviews with migrant workers, individual interviews with adult and nursery care assistants, as well as all individual and focus group interviews with workers from a commercial and hospitality group. I studied the latter through individual and focus group interviews with a Local Government group and a CIPD focus group.

Despite the variety of jobs and personal circumstances, I regarded all narratives as sharing a common theme which challenged the literature framings of precarious experiences. Thus, precariousness was both a relational, and a composite phenomenon.

I regarded it in relational terms, on account of its individualised manifestations. Gergana and Stanko in the migrants group were both graduates, yet experienced different precariousness on account of their different expectations of work in Britain. Migrant Alexey preferred life in Britain and found it more peaceful in comparison with his native Bulgaria while, for Evgeny, life here fell short of his original expectations.

Migrants Evgeny and Alexey both struggled to adopt British culture society and, although having a social footing through work, they were unwilling to participate in British society and were critical of some of its practices. For migrant Maria precarious work offered anonymity and removed any sense of shame and embarrassment on account of being a cleaner. This gave her a sense of fulfilment and, over time, she had started to appreciate her role and even achieve fulfilment from it.

For migrant Ivan, however, as for nursery assistant Sandra, work could not offer fulfilment, nor impacted on the construction of their self-concepts. Both of them were able to have a sense of fulfilment in the course of their day-to-day work, yet this fulfilment did not leave the professional sphere, nor appeared to be the cause of being proud of their jobs. It was, however, possible to attain a sense of satisfaction and experience positive precariousness through precarious work. Workers in the care group 'internalised' the values and ethos of their social groups, becoming members of a 'family' and wilfully relinquishing the boundary between professional and personal spheres. Across my sample of workers this 'tertiarisation' did not, however, lead to predominantly negative experiences through the commodification and alienation, suggested by Standing (2011) and Antunes (2013), respectively. Rather, the proximity between private and professional spheres could also enable participants such as care assistant Josh and nursery assistant Rebecca, to construct a meaningful professional identity. In turn, this had a formative impact not only on their self-esteem but also on the construction of positive self-concepts. This could enable precarious workers to be positive role models, providing an example to their own children, as did care assistant Leanne. The impact of the group as a 'family' was recognised also by workers in the Cleanwell focus groups, as well as zero-hour waiter Zac. This was sufficient to prompt the latter to express his preference for this type of work over other, white-collar jobs.

In turn, those positive experiences of workers in my sample could not be reduced to the economic assessment of work, as a means to an end. Participant experiences extended beyond the transactional provision of labour just to receive remuneration, and were also formed through the relationship between workers and their colleagues. Separation between workers and work was possible and I observed it in the local government focus group, yet it existed as the outcome of a more complex dynamic

than the determinism of contexts on experiences, which Standing (2011) suggests. Furthermore, the reductionist limitations of such determinist approaches prevented the essential characteristics of the precariousness 'whole' to emerge and be studied as a composite, yet individually 'sense-made' phenomenon. Thus, having argued that workers can re-construct the negative impact of their precarity contexts in the present chapter, I complete my phenomenological analysis by identifying the three common factors which enable this re-construction in Chapter 7.

## CHAPTER 7: EXPLORATION OF KEY THEMES AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Having presented key findings from the narratives of 'typical' precarious groups and a 'contrasting' sample of workers, Chapter 7 completes the final stage of the 'meaning condensation' analysis. In it, I organise the 'parts' of individual precarious experiences into three key themes, which summarise the essential aspects of the precariousness 'whole'. Having done so, I also use the 'imaginative variation', discussed in Chapter 5, to contextualise precariousness against the structures of low-skill and low-pay work and describe the interaction between structure and experience.

The first precariousness theme emerging in workers' narratives was that of 'relationality', challenging the categorically-negative nature of precarious experiences, proposed in the literature. Second, was the significance of the 'social group', observable against the proposed alienation of precarious workers, and challenging their collectivisation in a class-like precariat. Third, was the pedagogical impact even of precarious work, despite the proposed commodification of workers in precarious roles.

I conclude Chapter 7 by summarising my findings and conceptualise precariousness as the dynamic re-construction of experiences, by workers in precarity structures.

### *Precariousness is Relational*

The first common theme across the precarious experiences of my interview participants was that of relationality. In this sense, precariousness was neither an absolute, nor categorical experience reflecting the objective evaluation of low-skill, low-pay environments by those workers in them. Rather, the impact of contexts was re-constructed by comparison with a set of relational benchmarks, referring to past experiences and expectations. Those benchmarks were put in place as a result of

individual 'sense-making' and were a reminder that current experiences of work did not occur in isolation. Instead, for workers in my study, they were connected to past experiences, as well as being contingent on expectations they had for the present, and hopes for the future.

A good example of this was migrant Alexey's narrative. For him, the distinction between work in Britain and life in Britain appeared to be blurred in line with Standing's (2011) 'tertiarisation' process. His interview contained a number of, what initially appeared to be, *non sequitur* comments, with Alexey oscillating between discussing examples from within his professional and private sphere. Those oscillations, however, were not due to the lack of narrative concordance and I found a much simpler explanation. For Alexey, work had always been part of life in general, and therefore, precarious work and life in Britain were one and the same. This is how his precariousness became relational to Alexey's experiences to date, and not an isolated assessment of his present circumstances alone.

Thus, his positive experiences challenged the negative impact of 'tertiarisation' proposed in Standing (2011) and Antunes (2013). Alexey did not experience his working context in negative terms, yet this was not caused by an instrumental attitude to work. Alexey knew that he could earn more money in his native Bulgaria and was very much aware that his circumstances offered little employment security. Equally, this was not enough to cause an experience of negative precariousness such as anger, alienation or discontent as Standing (2011) suggests. Alexey had endured worse hardships in his childhood than those he was facing at the time of the interview and, although critical of certain British social practices, life and work in Britain was still relationally better than life and work in Bulgaria.

“It’s hard, of course it is. When I deliver my Chinese takeaways I get a pound for each delivery but a pound doesn’t go very far in terms of car maintenance, in terms of petrol, work is low paid and it’s hard. For example, sometimes you may have to go hungry because you need to save your food money for something else. But, I’m quite patient, I’m quite durable and I’m an optimist. I feel that maybe just because I don’t have enough money now, it doesn’t mean I won’t have any in the future! I earn very little and keep even less, but I feel calm, secure, I know what to expect and people are decent to me. This is what attracts us [Bulgarians] to the UK – the feeling of security, of being respected, you know, things like law and order. This is why I came and this is why I am still here.”

(Alexey, Male, Mechanic and Take-away Delivery Driver)

This was also the case with migrant Stanko, who was not only unhappy but had become anxious about his life in Bulgaria. As a result, the precarity of his low-skill, low-pay and short-term jobs in Britain was relationally better than remaining in Bulgaria where he had to carry a gun, to feel safe. The precarity of Stanko’s early years in Britain was greater than that of any British worker in similar circumstances, because of the restrictions of Stanko’s work permit. This meant that not only was Stanko able to work only for those companies who could renew his work permit, but also that if he could not find work, he would have had to leave the country.

This was also true for migrant Maria who felt that although her current position was of a minimum-wage, self-employed cleaner and did not offer the security of guaranteed employment, it offered her freedom. Having witnessed her parents stay in the same jobs throughout their whole working lives, Maria wished for a job with more scope for change and diversity. Maria’s current job offered her just that and, her precarious conditions notwithstanding; she felt that work in Britain was better in relation to work in Bulgaria. Maria was content, even happy and felt she was living the ‘American dream in the UK’:

“Life in post-communist Bulgaria didn’t offer a lot of opportunities so everyone was desperate to leave, to escape. This wasn’t easy, there were visa application forms to fill, embassy interviews to go through. Then, if you were successful and you came to the UK you were on your own and could start working to earn money just for yourself. That gave you freedom you didn’t have before. You can just concentrate on earning money or you can move to any part of the UK and just experience life. There is no need for you to make long-term plans, especially not with regards to work and employment.

I remember how easy it was when I first arrived here. At best, I planned my life week-by-week – much easier and simpler [than in Bulgaria].”

(Maria, Female, Self-employed Cleaner)

Such relationality vis-à-vis previous experiences, was also present in the care group, and an example of this was nursery assistant Susan’s narrative. Although low-paid, Susan’s present experience was preferable and more fulfilling to the supermarket role she had previously held. In turn, nursery assistant Joanna presented an interesting perspective on precariousness, as an experience better than that of unemployment. Standing’s (2011) precariat does not cover unemployed workers yet such an attitude suggested that although of low-pay and low-skill status, precarious work can still be a means of gainful employment and still better than having no work at all. Similarly, for Participant 3 in Cleanwell Focus Group #4 the current role offered little scope for choice or worker agency and he begrudged, what he saw, as Cleanwell offering employees no choice. At the same time, in the context of his interview, this was better than no work at all and he rationalised his position as better than having to look for work. This seemed to be especially significant in a South West of Britain context on account of my participants’ perceptions that there was not a lot of work available and the danger of unemployment was very real. This did not mean that the resultant worker attitude was solely one of instrumentality and, for instance, nursery assistant



Joanna spoke of how important being a 'mommy who went to work' was both for her personally, and as a means of having a positive influence on her daughter.

"I didn't have a very good relationship with my step-dad and I remember him turning around to me and saying, 'I don't think you'll amount to much, you're going to end up on the tills in Tesco'. I never forgot those words and never forgot how they made me feel then. So, I was going to prove him wrong and show him I can achieve something in my life. I was going to get qualified as a nursery nurse and prove him wrong. I enjoyed doing it as well. I really enjoyed doing the training and that surprised me. I felt incredibly proud of myself. I felt I could turn to my daughter and be something to make her proud, too."

(Joanna, Female, Fully-qualified Nursery Assistant)

This was a shared aspect of precariousness, and one I address in the 'pedagogy of precarious work' theme below.

Care assistant Josh also spoke of the personal satisfaction he achieved through his precarious job. There were strong elements of relationality in his narrative and Josh explained that his current employment setting was much better than previous care jobs he had had. Care assistant Simon provided a unique, for my sample of workers, but nevertheless powerful example of relationality, by describing his realisation that what he deemed unpalatable aspects of his job were, in fact, no different than what he did already:

"I have a disabled son and am his main carer. I remember speaking to my wife when I first considered this type of work [care work] and I said to her: 'when I think of care, I imagine just wiping bums'. It was a type of job that seemed very...unpleasant and unsightly. And do you know what she said to me, she said, 'you do that already with [son's name]' and this was like a light-bulb moment for me."

(Simon, Male, Care Assistant)

Nursery assistant Cath's precariousness was also relational, but this time vis-a-vis her previous experience of office work which, she felt, did not offer the same sense of

responsibility which her current role did. Precariousness was, thus, not an absolute or pre-determined category of experiences which workers took on regardless of their individual history, or previous experiences. Rather, it was the result of individual 'intentionality' (Sokolowski, 2000) of the context, in line with the worker's life-history.

Interestingly, past experiences had an impact on the construction of precariousness within my Local Government contrast group, also, where Participants 1, 2 and 3 all spoke of the effects previous, negatively precarious experiences had on the way recent organisational changes impacted them. Specifically, it seemed that the first round(s) of precarity circumstances had a particularly negative impact, manifested perhaps in anxiety, which was reduced with subsequent changes. The anxiety of the precariat is one of the key characteristics of Standing's (2011) framing, yet my interviews allowed me to observe its mitigation. Paradoxically, this mitigation did not occur through an increase in the worker's sense of work-security but, rather, through frequent exposure to precarity. This exposure seemed to 'inoculate' the worker against the effects of precarity, and I regarded this 'inoculation' to be caused by workers distancing themselves from the professional sphere of work.

"Participant 4, Male, HR Officer: This [the current round of organisational restructures] is unsettling but really pales into insignificance with other redundancies [I have been through]. There have been a few. I remember once going into work on a Monday, and there was someone at my desk and in my seat, because the company had gone down [gone bankrupt]. There was no notification, I found-out there and then. One door closes, another one opens, it is a serious of revolving doors..."

(Local Government Focus Group continued)

Participant 3, Female, Policy Officer: ...yes, but you can't tell someone that, you can't teach them. It is something you have to find-out for yourself. It is something you learn only through experience."

(Local Government Focus Group)

This was significant for my understanding of the range of precarious experiences and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8. Nevertheless, this occurrence seemed to underscore the relational nature of precariousness which, even when reoccurring, did not automatically give rise to worker anxiety. In the above, I felt that initial exposure to precarity for my participants may have led to negative precariousness through workers encountering change and insecurity for the first time in their careers. Subsequent episodes, however, had reference points, could be 'sense-made' and mitigated in relation to previous experiences, rather than experienced in a categorically negative way. Rather than prevent workers from willing to engage in work or lead to anomie (Standing, 2011), this had the contrasting effect. It made workers realise that there was 'life after job-loss', other work was available, and gave them confidence that they had the skills and experience to find it.

Precariousness was also relational not only with regards to workers' experiences, but also their expectations. Thus, it could become a negative experience when expectations of their current role or circumstances were formed, but not met. Migrant Evgeny's unfulfilled expectations of living in a country which resembled the cinematic landscape of American and British soap-operas was a case in point. Evgeny expected to find help and support from his contacts, and provide his family with a future better than the one which living in Greece or Bulgaria offered. In this way, he did not begrudge the precarity of his position, or the lack of secure work; rather, he struggled with the inability to reconcile the Britain he pictured, with the Britain he found.

"Since arriving in Britain I haven't felt right. I can only describe it as having a knot in my stomach. I can't describe this experience [of being in Britain] any other way. It is not what I expected. Britain is not like Greece or Cyprus, where everything is beautiful and not how I pictured it. I thought Britain would like the scenes in British movies but it isn't.

My family and I now live in a Council flat. Our neighbours above and below play loud music late at night we have to sleep in the kitchen to get away from the noise. We have a communal area where we hang the washing and they keep pulling our washing down and leaving it on the ground.”

(Evgeny, Male, Self-employed Builder and Decorator)

This was also the case with migrant Liliana who, although a graduate like her husband Stanko, did not share his satisfaction with work in Britain. Liliana did not work according to her degree specialism, nor held a graduate job, yet this was not such an unusual situation. Her experience was likely to be shared by a number of UK graduates forced to take any employment available or, if they could afford it, unpaid internships, in order to gain experience and while waiting for a job opening. Nevertheless, Liliana did not construct her precariousness in relation to this objective reality but, rather, in line with what she expected to find when she left her native Bulgaria and came to Britain. As such, I felt that Liliana’s negative precariousness was experienced on two levels, first as a British graduate expecting a graduate job but failing to secure it, and second, as a migrant who had come to Britain in search of a better life, and not encountering it. Importantly, Liliana’s narrative also failed to separate the sphere of work from that of her private-life. Yet, her negative precariousness was not caused by this ‘tertiarisation’ but rather, was influenced by Liliana’s position in a Bulgarian ‘social group’, and ‘internalisation’ (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) of the values of her family, represented in her narrative by her Mum. Thus, Liliana adopted her Mum’s disbelief and dislike of the way people in her area dressed, and used it as an illustration of how unpleasant the experience of her precarious work was.

Similarly, HR Consultant Sheila and HR Officer Trevor in my contrasting group offered powerful examples of the negative precariousness resulting when reality diverged from

workers' expectations. Although approached as a non-precarious worker, Sheila's experience of change through workplace restructure suggested that she had also experienced precariousness. Sheila's perception was that whilst happiness at work was important, private-life and professional spheres were and should be, inherently separate. A change in working circumstances, however, led to an influx of work-awareness into her private life, following a realisation of the proximity between her professional and private spheres. Sheila had also expected that developing her skill-set and having significant experience would be sufficient to mitigate against negative precariousness, yet the actual experience failed to meet her expectations. Furthermore, Sheila's expectation that her Local Government employer would support also was not met, causing her high levels of stress, worry and disappointment.

"I am not sure currently that who I am as a person and who the organisation is, are aligned. And that's the issue, my issue is that I can't morally continue to be working in HR as you are an agent of the organisation. I am not sure I believe in the organisation any more, or believe in what it stands for. I haven't had a problem up in to this point because I have believed in everything I have done...but, I'm not sure that I can continue.

It's not a security thing, it's not a financial thing. I know what type of organisation I want to work for, and I know what type of organisation I can't work for."

(Sheila, Female, HR Consultant)

The negative precariousness that ensued was also described by Trevor, for whom it amounted to anxiety attacks.

Contrastingly, and despite also being a graduate, migrant Celeste did not construct her precariousness as an absolute state stemming from her long hours of work and low pay but, rather with the expectation of better work which this experience provided her. This may also be regarded as an instrumental attitude to work on Celeste's behalf. However, I believe that Celeste did not demonstrate an attitude of Marxist

commodification and alienation (Mészáros, 1986) because for her work was not just a means for attaining something outside of work. Celeste enjoyed her job and enjoyed her position within the 'social group' of her colleagues, with which she had built trust and camaraderie. Although having handed in her notice, Celeste remained in contact with her former colleagues and was in two minds about withdrawing her notice and going back to a job which paid less and required her to work longer hours than her current one:

"They [her colleagues] are good guys, you know, and we are good friends. I really don't know if I can go through with it [leaving]. I will miss the guys and I will miss the customers. And it was a good experience, customers would complement me on the service...I had a good relationship with the regular clients..."

(Celeste, Female, Waitress)

Taking together, my participants appeared to be sharing a 'sense-making' approach, whereby they compared present reality with what could have been. This highlighted precariousness as an individual, rather than a collective experience likely to be shared by all workers in similar circumstances just by virtue of being in a shared position vis-à-vis an Other. This challenged the scope for collective action by precarious workers and, though this, the likelihood of organised resistance against the terms and conditions of precarious work. The above discussion also highlights the significant role of the 'social group' as a moderator of worker experiences. The 'social group', thus, emerged as a middle-ground type of worker organisation which challenged the atomising impact of modernity (Beck, 2000), but also the collectivisation of workers into a precariat (Standing, 2011).

### *Precariousness is Moderated by the 'Social Group'*

Thus, precarious experiences of my participants were also affected and moderated by their participation in work as members of a 'social group'. In my literature review I had anticipated the role and significance of 'social group' membership and it emerged in my participants narratives as a two-fold challenge to existing precarious work assumptions. First, it suggested that even 'social group' formed in the context of precarious work can improve workers' self-esteem and contribute to the formation of meaningful and stable professional identities. Second, it showed that while precarious work did not lead to organised resistance, nor collectivised workers as a class, it could be a source of social support (compare with McGuire, 2007).

In turn, 'social groups' could be constructed to a varying degree of abstraction (Knight and Haslam, 2010; Haslam, 2001). They could include fellow workers in the same team and colleagues in the same organisation, but needed not be limited to them. Thus, migrant Gergana re-constructed her precarious experience through her Bulgarian 'social group'. Specifically, I saw Gergana's use of a Bulgarian term as an attempt to re-construct her experiences through her position in her Bulgarian 'social group'. By applying the term 'guzarka' to her migrant identity, Gergana rejected it, and with it invalidated the stigma which, in her view, members of British society attached to it.

Migrant Celeste's 'social group' also moderated their precarious experiences through a similar method, and differentiated themselves from the restaurant owner by referring to him as 'amo'. I do not regard this practice to qualify as the subversive behaviour indicating the presence of a sub-culture in Cohen (1980) since the workers continued to fulfil their duties, rather than strike and rebel. Nevertheless, the use of a term meaningful to the group, but not by those outside it, provided its members with a

shared sense of solidarity and a means to re-construct their experiences, if not their terms and conditions.

“Despite all the problems and long shifts, I really enjoyed working with the people there and I had really good team-mates. They made everything worthwhile. We could talk, have a laugh, sometimes at the owner’s expense and that helped us all cope. I would see these guys more often than I saw my boyfriend! We would see each other on days-off and hang-out. I still see them now.”

(Celeste, Female, Waitress)

Migrant Maria also drew on the significance of her group position in explaining that while she would be embarrassed to be a cleaner in Bulgaria, she was happy to do so in Britain, where no one knew her. In Britain she may be considered a precarious worker but, rather than fear the stigma she embraced it, knowing perhaps that she retained a position within her Bulgarian ‘social group’ and preserved her Bulgarian identity. Migrant Liliana could do the same and protect her Bulgarian identity untarnished by her precarious role yet was unable, since her ‘social group’ knew of her precarious role and was critical of it. Liliana also felt that she was unable to preserve her position into an abstract group of UK graduates while working in a fish and chips shop. Using the benchmark of her position in those ‘social groups’, Liliana evaluated her current position in negative terms and, as a result, experienced negative precariousness.

“As I’ve said already, it’s not a very nice feeling to work hard for three years, get a degree and end-up serving people on benefits. Getting a degree in a different language is not easy at all, and it cost me a lot of effort. I’d never studied in the UK before so it was something very different, totally unknown to me. I thought that at the end of it, I’d get a job where I work with normal people! Doing this [working in a fish and chips shop] is definitely not what I expected when I came to Britain.

I try not to think too much about it, as it really depresses me sometimes...”

(Liliana, Female, Shop Assistant)



Much more positive was the experiences of precariousness as 'family', narrated by workers in both the care, and commercial and hospitality group. This emerged in the narratives of, for instance, care assistant Josh, nursery assistant Rebecca, care assistant Susan and waiter Zac. This was significant as it underscored a fundamental experience of support and connectivity in a context of precarity, which not only made work pleasant, but also meaningful. Rather than imposing insecurity on the worker, the impact of the context was re-constructed through the support obtained from the 'social group'. Thus, I believe the 'family' metaphor was important on two counts. First, it could rebut reductive explanations of positive precariousness as 'false consciousness'. Specifically, it did so by explaining positive precariousness through the communal and social nature of the experience, rather than through the veneer of inflated meaningfulness of work. In this sense, workers retained their awareness of their type of work and the low-pay, low-skill terms and conditions of their role but, like the participants in Cleanwell Focus Group # 1, to experience them as a family. Second, the experience of precariousness as belonging to a family pointed to the personal and inherently individual nature of the phenomenon. As an experience, it was constructed by individual workers and moderated by personal participation in 'social groups'. In those instances group participation was not simply one of identification with the group but suggested that worker had 'internalised' (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) the group's ethos, values and beliefs. Rather than having to 'sense-make' their own position in society and work in relation to previous experiences, this enabled him or her, to combat the precarity of their context by adopting existing group attitudes. Importantly, participants in my interview sample showed no signs of overarching solidarity or collective consciousness. Precariousness could enable the experience of

a family but, in my sample, families did not come together and organise as a fledgling precariat class.

“Participant 5, Female, Cleaner: Friends and family are a big thing down here, you rely on your colleagues, and they rely on you with looking after the kids, things like that...

Participant 3, Female, Cleaner: Up in London there are people who don't even speak to the person in the desk next to them, don't even know their name! They can spend their whole lives working next door to a stranger! But yeah, as [Participant 1 – see Chapter 6] said, it's not like that here, we have become our own little family, we share our problems and try to help each other.”

(Cleanwell Focus Group # 2)

The group could, thus, make even precarious contexts meaningful despite Standing (2011) argument that a subordinate and ‘denizen’ socio-economic position leads to the absence of a professional identity for precariat members. Furthermore, even if workers did not ‘internalise’ their group’s values, they were still capable of positive bias towards their group in line with ‘social change’ strategies (see, for example, Trepte, 2012). In this way, a number of Cleanwell employees were able to regard their ‘social group’ in positive terms by either seeing it as a means to work alongside the military, or by regarding members of the military as members of the group. Thus, a number of Cleanwell participants chose to identify with the squadron, rather than their employer or managers. Once again, while this did not alter the objective reality of work, it could enable workers to find enjoyment, meaning and even improve their self-esteem through precarious work.

Initially, this appeared to be a manifestation of ‘false consciousness’, especially in the narrative of Participant 5 in Cleanwell Focus Group # 4, who felt she supported the work of the forces, and shared in their success.

“Participant 1, Male, Cleaner: We have developed this sense of, this feeling of pride. We are part of the squadron, and we do our bit for it, simple as that, really...

Participant 3, Male, Cleaner: ...yeah, and this really motivates you and you don't mind going the extra mile...you put in that much more effort in your duties and try to do them to the best of your ability, day-in and day-out.s”

(Cleanwell Focus Group # 4)

Nevertheless, taken holistically, the majority of Cleanwell employees did not feel that adopting the squadron as their ‘in-group’ added more personal meaning to what they did, or inflated its significance. Rather, it enabled them to find more enjoyment, through identifying with a group of people by whom they were respected and, generally, more appreciated. Neither was the squadron simply a highly-abstract ‘social group’, since Cleanwell workers were physically present at the military base and working side-by-side with members of the military. For all intents and purposes, Cleanwell were working for the military, simply without being employed by them. Identification with the military enabled Cleanwell workers to differentiate between objective terms, conditions and management structures which were at time regarded in negative terms; and the daily experience of doing the work itself. In turn, the awareness of difference could improve the cohesion of the group, and a worker ‘in-group’ could feel equally united and differentiated from managers, the unemployed, those on benefits and from colleagues considered ‘born moaners’. Nursery assistant Cath and waiter Zac, thus, showed negative bias against ‘out-groups’ of white-collar jobs and workers in them. The ‘social group’, here, was the filter modifying the impact of precarity structures and experiences.

Nevertheless, precarious work carried a degree of social stigma, and participants such as Gergana and Josh were aware of it when they discussed the 'arse wiping' aspects of their jobs. This, however, did not mean that precarious workers were necessarily trying to change their economic position, or aspired to higher-status, better-paid jobs since those, for some of my participants, were less desirable than their current ones. However, this identity had sufficient meaning to participant, to prompt an effort to change social perception of it. Care assistants in my sample did this by taking their home residents in the community and doing activities with them. This 'normalised' care work as something which can occur in society and not just behind closed doors and, by extension, combatted the social stigma of the care assistant role. Precarious workers like care assistant Josh also tried to change the social position of their group and transform its 'out-group' status. Rather than experiencing anger and alienation on account of being part of a denizen group as Standing (2011) suggests, precarious work could offer both 'social group' membership and a meaningful professional identity which precarious workers not only accepted but also defended.

Membership within a group was not guaranteed, however, nor did workers always have to engage in intragroup behaviour (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). The experiences of Sheila and Trevor in the contrasting group demonstrate how lack of group support could increase the uncertainty of the working circumstances. In Sheila's case, the intra-group competitiveness for work prevented the emergence of 'social group' cohesion and camaraderie, despite the uncertainty, which all members shared. Trevor also discussed the negative impact which his lack of 'social group' support created during the period of local government restructuring. In his case members of the 'in-group' were either on sick leave, or left the organisation and, since Trevor felt he could not trust those he remained, his negative precariousness was particularly strong.

“People were being treated like crap. Literally. So, as a result, some of my colleagues left, including [colleague name]. Me and him [colleague who left] were actually quite good mates and I would share a lift with him quite often. He had been with the organisation for years and was unhappy for quite a while so, when he left, I went to speak to [manager name] and told him I was unhappy with the way things were being handled.

Only later did I find-out from colleagues that he [manager] had been going round telling people that I was a bit upset because my mate had left! How is that professional or appropriate!”

(Trevor, Male, HR Officer)

Trevor retained his position within the ‘social group’ and the professional identity which came with it, yet this ‘in-group’ did not automatically retain its significance as a source of support. The corruption which Trevor alleged, further, seemed to indicate issues of fairness within the organisation and, specifically, the absence of ‘distributive’ justice (Greenberg, 1990), despite an extensive procedural framework to safeguard employees from ‘ill-treatment’ (Fevre et al., 2012).

As well as being a relational experience, precariousness could, thus, be moderated by participation in the ‘social group’. This presented another challenge to Standing (2011) and showed that access to work groups could endow workers with a meaningful professional identity. Precarious workers could use this identity to improve their self-esteem, and their self-concept. At times, they were also willing to exhibit it and even defend it publically, seeking to change popular perceptions in the process. Even in instances when this identity carried stigma in social perceptions, it was still meaningful through being recognised and respected by fellow members of the ‘social group’.

### *Precariousness is Moderated by the Pedagogy of Work*

The final moderator of the precarious experiences of workers in my sample was the perception of personal growth, development and learning which participation in work,

even precarious work, could lead to. Marxist theory (Antunes, 2013) has already acknowledged the humanising impact of work, yet not in an individualising, capitalist context. The positive experience of precarity was, in turn, caused by workers regarding even their low-pay, low-skill roles, rather than 'work' in an idealised sense, as valuable.

While this theme was most prominent in the care group, migrant Gergana's interview had an unexpected twist where she acknowledged that she had begrudgingly started to appreciate certain practices at her workplace. Having derided her colleagues for their blind adherence to rules, Gergana gave an example of how an incident changed her views, both of rules and her colleagues:

"In the kitchen there is a massive washing-up liquid container. Since we have to help with the washing-up I, as a Bulgarian, thought I was smarter and won't struggle trying to lift it, the way the others [the other care assistants] did. I made a small hole in a squash bottle, filled it up with washing-up liquid and started using that. The manager came and told me I shouldn't do that. To be honest, I lost it. I started shouting and arguing. She calmly explained that a resident may walk in the kitchen, think its orange juice and drink it because the washing-up liquid was also yellow.

I was gobsmacked. I just saw the whole thing from a different perspective and thought, 'so, that's why they have all these rules here, so that something terrible doesn't happen...' And, you know, it occurred to me that something similar almost happened with my husband many years ago. We had guests and he was pouring them all a glass of *rakia* [home-made brandy]. Only it wasn't brandy – I had used a brandy bottle to store turpentine...luckily I realised it before we toasted!"

(Gergana, Female, Care Assistant)

Although the described incident was not of particular magnitude, it was sufficient to moderate Gergana's precariousness, away from a sense of being a target of criticism from her 'social group' and towards its 'sense-making' as an activity from which she could learn. By realising that she is not singled-out and starting to gain respect for her manager's guidance, Gergana was able to apply the learning to re-construct her

working, and personal experiences. Similarly, migrant Alexey was also able to re-construct his precariousness by recourse to his early exposure to the need to work, which had stayed with him and led him to regard work and life as part of the same experience.

The pedagogic role of work shaping precariousness within the care group could occur within the 'family' context also, with workers like nursery assistants Cath and Susan speaking of improving their confidence through work. Nursery assistant Rebecca also improved her confidence through her precarious role, while nursery assistant Joanna was able to 'find herself again' through work. In turn, care home manager Joan's narrative also suggested that her own negative experiences, as a precarious care worker in the past, influenced a more staff-friendly approach and, specifically, the increase of the staff-to-resident ratio:

"The guys [workers] that came and joined me knew exactly what I was about, they knew it's all about the quality of care. I value my staff and as soon as you can get someone to start valuing themselves then all the positives start to come out.

I remember when I first started - the care homes where I worked were pretty grim...I was never provided with any training at all apart from what I did myself out of my own initiative and the mandatory training. That was basic though, and it never prepared me for some of the situations I had to deal with.

So now that I run this home, I try and do right by my guys [workers]. I have a high resident-staff ratio, because I think it [the legal requirement] is unfair. I was seeing my guys [workers] shattered after a 7-hours-shift because of all they had to do. The guys were running around all the time. They give me 100% and I try and reciprocate that. They know they can phone me 24 hours a day 7 days a week. At the same time, I've given them the tools and the training now and they don't need to".

(Joan, female, care home manager)

Thus, in the instance of Participant 1, (Cleanwell Focus Group # 2) precariousness was not an altogether negative experience as it fit within the example left by his parents, who worked all their lives. This experience occurred on similar lines as nursery manager Dorothy whose early exposure to work also seemed to have shaped her views not only of work and her vocation but people. Thus, when she discussed her previous roles in nursery work she spoke not only of the impact of her role on families but, also, of the personal learning which her roles had provided her with.

Some of the things back then [her early career days] frighten me to death now (laughs)! But you but you just did it in those days, like sometimes I'd be up assisting with a [baby] delivery throughout the whole the night and then, without resting, I'd be working in the morning, making the porridge for the breakfast. I would anything and everything. I would wash nappies, wash the floor, cook breakfast and all of that in between looking after babies! It was lovely"

(Dorothy, Female, Nursery Manager)

The scope for work to have a positive, developmental impact on the worker even in the context of low-skill, low-pay work, did not have to result in the improvement of the worker's position within his and her employment structures. In this way, it did not have to lead to a change in the structures of employment, nor create a progression path. It could be, first and foremost, and experience of workers gaining self-esteem and improving their self-concept through participation in precarious work. As workers developed their social identities through their professional 'social groups' they were, in turn, able to find their social position and assert it in social interactions with others. In social perceptions they remained precarious workers but this did not mean they have to regard themselves as stigmatised denizens. This is how precarious work enabled care assistant Josh to, ultimately, feel better about himself, yet the pedagogic impact of work on positive precariousness did not end with the workers themselves.



In turn, a number of my participants sought to also provide a positive example to their own children. Migrant Maria's effort to show her son the value of work seemed was also meant as an example with an underlying pedagogic moral. Her precariousness, therefore, placed Maria in a position from which she could instruct others.

"People have to help each other. In the early days I relied on my connections to find stuff out and I now try and do the same for others. I am now the one with experience of living and working in the UK, so can pass some of it onto others. If no one tells them, how would they know? It can be simple things like how to look for jobs or where to go in order to apply for benefits."

(Maria, Female, Self-employed Cleaner)

Previous exposure to precariousness could, thus, have a moderating impact on current experiences, where past learning was applied in order to re-construct the present experience. This was manifest in the local government focus group, where participants spoke of the anxiety of early precarious experiences being diminished in subsequent rounds of exposure to precarity. Having encountered precarity conditions and survived them once, workers gained confidence of their ability to cope and survive. It seemed that admin officer Emma's interview presented the point at which precariousness ceased to be negative, and became a pedagogic experience on which she could draw in the future.

"I have had interviews externally and it [the process] has given me more confidence. I am looking forward to a new challenge, to moving on. It is not about getting the best paid job in the world, but about developing, keeping your skills up. And I know now that I have good, transferable skills which I can take with me..."

(Emma, Female, Admin Officer)

Taken together the three shared aspects of the precarious experience made for a phenomenon the depth of which was systemically overlooked in the literature. It seemed that precarious work could provide a positive experience, in relation to previous worker experiences, expectations and position within the 'social group'. Importantly, this positive personal impact suggested a proximity between the professional and private spheres which was not an automatically negative experience as Antunes (2013) suggests. This was not shared by everyone, and workers like HR consultant Sheila, and nursery assistants Liz and Sandra narrated divergent experience which reflected the Marxist alienation between workers and work (Mészáros, 1986). I did not consider these as challenges to the argument for precariousness having the capacity to be a positive experience but, rather, as cases illustrating the opposing, negative end of the precarious experience.

### *Precarity Experiences and Precarity Structures*

The emergence of the above themes created the need to regard precariousness as a complex phenomenon, occurring as a dynamic between precarity structures and individual 'intending' of them. This, once again, suggested that assumption of structural determinism of precarity structures on workers' experiences was too simplistic and reductionist an explanation of the precariousness phenomenon. In turn, this presented the need for an alternative framing of the relationship between precarious structures and experiences, as per Figure 4 below. Consequently, I now turn to this alternative framing, which also fulfils the final stage of the phenomenological 'meaning condensation' method of analysis. Thus, I use the 'imaginative variation' technique discussed in Chapter 5 to provide a description of precariousness as a 'whole', and show the dynamic relationship between context and

experiences. Rather than subjugating precariousness to the objective structures of employment, I seek to account for the individual nature of the precarious experience and show the scope for its moderation and re-construction by the workers themselves.

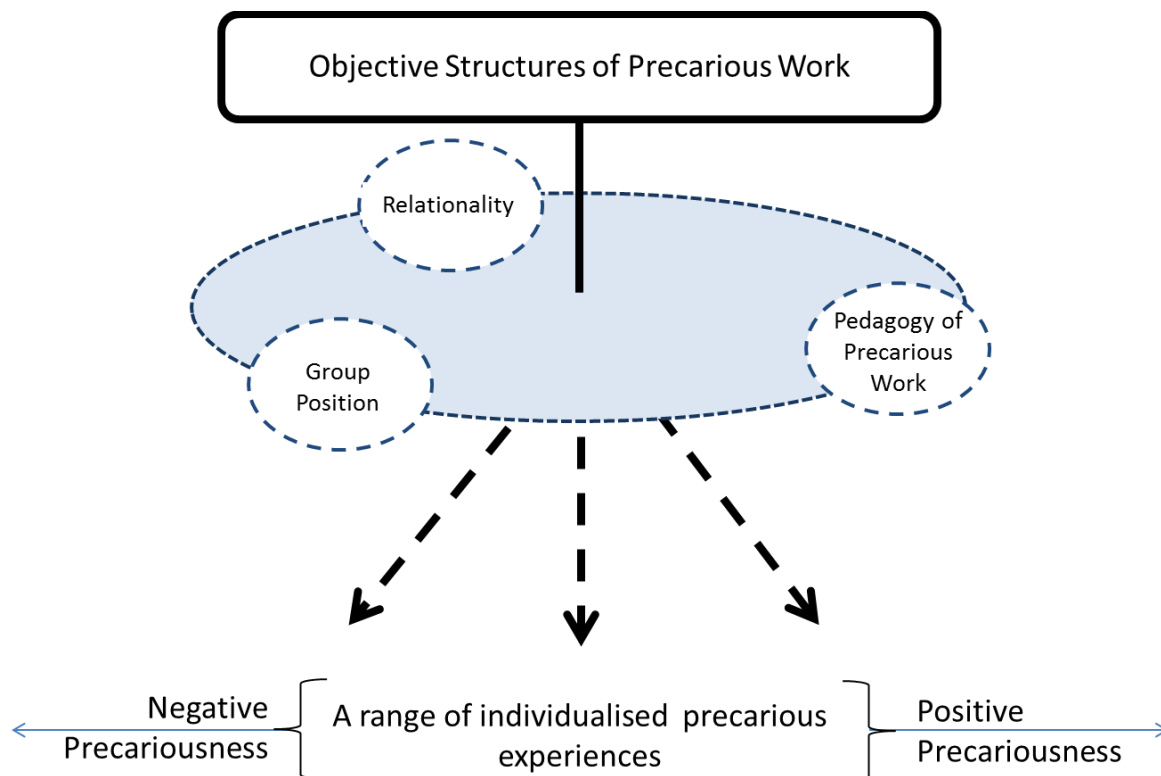


Figure 4: The re-construction of the negative context impact to create a range of precarious experiences

In my construction of precariousness, the phenomenon is manifested in the context of low-skill, low-pay work. Although appearing as a truism, this is an important distinction which differentiates my approach from existing conceptualisations and constructs. Thus, precariousness is neither an idealised experience which occurs outside the context of precarious work and, thus, independent of it; nor one entirely governed by the present context of work. Precariousness is still an experience associated with an objective set of structures, terms and conditions, that is, the context of low-skill and

low-pay work. However, it now consists of a full and comprehensive range of experiences, illustrated by the horizontal, bi-polar spectrum in Figure 4. In my conceptualisation, those in the positive spectrum are no-longer unrepresentative of precariousness, and cannot be explained reductively. That is, they are no longer instances of precariat members' instrumental attitude towards work and born of the wilful separation between the personal and professional spheres of work. In the course of my research I encountered a much simpler explanation, namely, that even precarity contexts can be sources for positive experiences, by offering workers the means to access and participate in a 'social group' and through it, in a group identity. This identity may be associated with social stigma yet this status is not ubiquitous and there is scope for re-negotiating it on an individual basis the way migrant Maria and care assistant Josh did. Furthermore, this social identity is respected and meaningful in the actual context work and at the point of contact between work and society. In this way care workers had an impact on their home residents, and were trusted by the parents of nursery children. Cleanwell workers were deemed important and also respected by members of the squadron who they looked after. This did not have to always accord precarious work a central place in a worker's life yet, when it did, the professional satisfaction could also become personal gratification. This was important for workers in my sample and meant that precariousness was, also, linked to the phenomenological 'intending' of the precarious work context, which re-constructed, rather than merely reflected it. Precariousness was, thus, a wider and more over-reaching phenomenon and was not circumscribed to the present precarity context. As indicated by the three precariousness themes above, precarious experiences could connect with past experiences, but also be used to construct expectations for future employment paths.

Therefore, in terms of the relationship between precarity and precariousness, Figure 4 retains the directionality of impact, and shows a movement from context, towards experiences. Precariousness is, thus, occurring in a particular and objectively identifiable context which includes some jobs, but not others. In my sample, however, even workers in nominally non-precarious jobs had been subject to the threat of job-loss and redundancy. Thus, even though precariousness was linked to precarious work, change could introduce precarity even in stable, well-paid, high-skill roles. In turn, and although individually constructed, precariousness in Figure 4 is not a solipsistic experience which workers 'sense-makes' in isolation from his or her work surroundings. On the contrary, the scope for relationality and group position shows precarious experiences to be based on the dynamic between workers and their employment contexts. Importantly, this is not just the present context, but the full history of the worker's experiences. Thus, whether or not precarious work is able to exert a positive impact on the worker in relation to past experiences and expectations, or not; it is always a dynamic between the context and workers' 'intending' of it.

While both precarity as a context and worker 'intentionality' need to be present for precariousness to occur, the one-way directionality in Figure 4 indicates another significant aspect of the phenomenon. Workers in my sample were able to re-construct their precarious experiences, but could not change their working environments, whether individually or through collective action. In other words, despite individual variations of the precarious experience, it remained situated in an objective context.

I believe that it is this inability to change the context, which leads observers like Standing (2014; 2011), Doogan (2015; 2013), Emmenegger (2012), Heery and Salmon (2002) and Bourdieu (1998) to regard the position of precarious workers in

predominantly negative terms. However, the context was not the sole factor determining worker experiences in my sample. What is more, the precarious context could lead to positive, meaningful and fulfilling experiences, yet this did not change the low-pay and low-skill reality of work. This shared position vis-à-vis work and the State, did not unify precarious denizens, nor led them to collectively rebel against their terms and conditions. Thus, I found no evidence to support Standing's (2011) 'rising class' thesis. Workers could come together in a shared context and work alongside each other, doing similar work for similar (that is, minimum) rates of pay. In some instances, as with Participant 3 (Cleanwell Focus Group # 2) they could even share personal histories outside of work, yet this did not create a feeling of collective consciousness. In instances of positive precariousness employees did not want to change their context, on occasion of negative precariousness they were unable, and when workers held instrumental attitudes, they were not interested in changing them. Thus, I observed no indication of employees being ready to rise-up and overthrow the structures of precarious work. Despite referred as the 'new dangerous class' (Standing, 2011), I found no evidence of precarious experiences leading workers in my sample down the ideological path which Marx and Engels (1992) prescribe for the proletariat.

The main reason for this, within the confines of my sample, was the individualised nature of the precarious experiences. In Figure 4 I identified three common aspects of the precariousness, as derived from my interviews. Nevertheless, this did not mean that all individuals regarded all three factors as equally significant. This is why I presented them as parts of a shared precariousness 'filter', yet fluid and moving along the plane of individual worker 'intentionality'. The significance of each of the moderating factors varied on an individual basis and, even though all three were likely

to be present in the construction of precariousness, the 'weighting' of each factor was likely to differ from worker to worker. This differentiation and individualisation which, in the literature review I associated with the context of modernity, appeared an obstacle for the development of class consciousness by the precariat. Lukács (1983) and Mészáros (1986) discuss the gradual emergence of proletariat class consciousness through joint action, rather than as an inherent ability the proletariat possess at the very beginning. Nevertheless, in the instance of individualised precarious experiences in a modern context, it is difficult to imagine how joint action could produce a similar awareness, or enable collective worker solidarity against the State as Standing (2014) argues. There was no suggestion of the precariat posing a clear and present danger to the State, either. Rather, they ran the danger of being misunderstood and, through this, feared as an Other, as somehow different from the rest of society. The precarious workers in my sample were not different, however. They viewed work satisfaction and relationships with colleagues as important; they were aware of social perceptions and also held generalised prejudices towards group different from them.

The absence of collective solidarity, thus, did not mean that workers in my sample were social denizens, alienated from their jobs, each other and society (Mészáros, 1986). The absence of collective awareness did not prevent workers from gaining access to meaningful 'group' membership through precarious work. This 'group' was often an 'out-group' according to social standards, and workers were aware of the stigma attached to their roles. Nevertheless, this did not automatically make worker membership in it meaningless, nor lead to alienation and isolation. By virtue of having access to a professional identity as cleaners, carers and waiters, precarious workers could also participate in British society. This, however, is British society in a modernity

context which, as Young (2007) argues, boasts a variety of jobs, terms and conditions of employment. Such a context makes both the inference of personal circumstances, and denigration of a person based on their job title, difficult. Thus, care worker Josh could become a support assistant in new social settings, and divulge the stigma of 'bum wiping' only if he wanted. Such re-construction of precariousness could invite accusations of 'false consciousness' and lead to the sweeping conclusion that, regardless of whether Josh chooses to see himself as a support worker or a care assistant, he is still a precarious worker in a low-skill and low-wage role.

I would tend to disagree with such a view, because the impact of what Josh and his colleagues in adult and nursery care work did, on the personal lives of home residents and children in the nursery, was significant. So was that of Cleanwell employees on the squadrons at the South West military base. I felt that worker consciousness of this impact should be encouraged, rather than dismissed as a false representation of reality. On a similar note, 'false consciousness' is an effort on the part of a worker to find meaning where there is none. Therefore, its basic motif could be viewed as a struggle, on the part of the precarious worker, to feel better about his or her work and, thus, attain an experience of positive precariousness. Yet, workers in my sample often started by narrating their enjoyment of work first, and tried to rationalise this enjoyment by pointing to the impact they have, after. Neither was the impact of their work the only source of enjoyment and meaning, and I identified three shared characteristics of the precariousness 'whole', moderating the phenomenon's personal significance and presenting it as less simplistic and negative than the literature suggested. Lastly, having been able to participate in society through their precarious jobs, precarious workers were able to pass the stigma of precarious work to those who had no work at all. As members of society precarious workers were, thus, able to criticise the



unemployed and those on benefits as wilful authors of their own misfortune, differentiating themselves from the latter. Such critiques may have betrayed the same level of general stigmatisation the precariat themselves were suffering from and were, possibly, based on anecdotal evidence and media misrepresentation. Nevertheless, this suggested that precarious work did not have to be exclusively alienating for the worker, and could be a source of social citizenship. Once again, such social citizenship did not evidence the rise of precariat solidarity and workers were able to also denigrate colleagues for failing to adopt the same ethos as them. Precariousness enabled cohesion, yet this was the cohesion of an 'in-group' rather than a class, be it a 'class-in-the-making'.

Importantly, when proximity between the sphere of precarious work and that of personal experiences occurred, workers associated themselves with their precarious jobs and were able to improve their self-esteem through the experience of precarious work. Conversely, in instances of separation between the private sphere and that of professional engagement, workers in my sample looked on work as an instrumental means to fulfil other ends. In those cases, it was possible for separation between worker and work to occur. This attitude appeared close to Marxist theories of individualisation and worker commodification, namely, through the alienation of the worker from the structures of work. I develop this relationship in Chapter 8, where I refer to workers in close proximity to their work as 'working people', and contrast their experiences to 'people in work', who 'intend' their personal lives as separate from the sphere of work.

## *Summary*

In Chapter 7 I completed the phenomenological description of precariousness, by constructing it as an experience based on precarious workers' 'intending' of precarity contexts. I also outlined its three essential characteristics, that of relationality, 'social group' moderation and the positive, pedagogic impact even of precarious work.

I argued that while placed against the objective context of low-pay and low-skill precarious work, precariousness was, nevertheless, an individual experience. Furthermore, while precariousness was contingent on the presence of specific employment conditions, it was neither abstract, nor structurally-determined by those conditions. Rather, it could be re-constructed by workers in line with their individual relationship with each of the three components of precariousness, and individual 'weighting' placed on each one of them.

In line with this, for migrants Alexey and Yordan the precarious experiences of British work was preferable to life in Bulgaria, and it enabled migrant Maria to live the 'American dream in the UK'. Conversely, while not inherently negative in itself, it could become such in relation to previous expectations as with migrant Evgeny, for whom the reality of British life failed to measure up to his expectations prior to arriving.

Members of the care group could also re-construct their precarious experience in relation to previous employment as in nursery assistant Susan's case. Nursery care was low-paid, yet more fulfilling than Susan's previous job as a supermarket assistant. Her colleague Joanna offered an even starker relational contrast, and she considered her present precariousness as preferable to not having a job at all. In turn, care assistant Simon offered a powerful example of how he re-constructed his precarious experience, away from its unpleasant 'bum-wiping' connotations, by realising that it is

not different from what he already did in looking after his disabled son at home. This aspect was present in the commercial and hospitality group with waiter Zac regarding his job as more interesting than being 'bored and clock-watching' in an office. Participants in Cleanwell Focus Group # 4 also re-constructed their precariousness relationally, whether vis-à-vis to past jobs or due to access to fair terms and conditions.

Migrant Liliana's precariousness was also negative in relational terms, and on account of her expectations of employment opportunities in Britain. As a migrant, she had left her native Bulgaria expecting to find a better life in the South West of Britain. As a UK graduate, she had expected access to better employment than the one she could have in Bulgaria. Her work in a fish and chip shop was able to fulfil neither of those expectations. The existence of migrants in similar low-pay, low-skill roles did not alleviate her disillusionment, as her precariousness was experienced in line with her own, individual 'sense-making'.

The workers' position within the 'social group' was another factor enabling the reconstruction of precarious experiences. In this sense, migrant Gergana's dissatisfaction with her British colleagues enabled her to treat them as an 'out-group', and describe her experiences through the lens of her Bulgarian 'in-group' and through the use of a Bulgarian term, 'guzarka'. This underscored and re-stated her position within a different group, that of friends and acquaintances in Bulgaria and thus, moderated her experiences as a carer. Migrant Celeste adopted a similar term within her working group, dubbing the business owner 'amo', a derogatory term which he heard but did not understand. In turn, Cleanwell workers assumed membership to an aspirational group of military staff, with which they could associate with, and differentiate themselves from their actual Cleanwell employers.

The availability of a 'social group', however, did not guarantee positive precariousness, nor was membership within the group itself always retainable. HR consultant Sheila exited her group and 'intended' her precariousness on an intrapersonal basis. This was the result of becoming disillusioned with their practises which she regarded as political games and, thus, contravened her personal ethos. This, in turn, led to Sheila's decision to cease interaction and association with the group, altogether. In the case of admin officer Emma and HR officer Trevor, the 'in-group' was decimated following their colleagues' exit from the organisation. The absence of a group, whether on account of lack of fit, or lack of a group, thus, could lead to a negative precarious experience during a period of organisational restructure.

Lastly, precariousness could also be re-constructed through the pedagogic impact which work had even on individuals in low-skill, low-pay environments. In this way workers could feel that just by being in work, they were living-up the example set by their parents or were, in turn, setting an example themselves. Even precarious work could lead to workers themselves feeling more confident because of their working experiences and, even, learning to deal with negative experiences through being exposed to them. The latter was the case with the workers in the local government focus group. Having become 'inoculated' by frequent exposure to precarity in the past, they were able to moderate the uncertainty of their present circumstances of organisational change.

Despite the structures of precarity, represented by the terms and conditions on which workers were employed, remaining unchanged, there was scope for re-constructing the precarious experience, which could offer individual workers a range of both positive and negative experiences. As well as being a dynamic between context and

worker 'intentionality', those experiences were dynamic and could change over time as was the case with HR consultant Sheila and migrant Gergana.

As a phenomenological 'whole', precariousness appeared to be dependent on the proximity between precarious workers and precarious contexts and in Chapter 8 I seek to explain this relationship through an emergent typology of precariousness. Through it, I describe the range of precarious experiences of workers in my sample as occurring between the opposing categories of 'working people' and 'people in work'.

## CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Having presented the individual aspects of the precarious experiences in Chapter 6 and discussed it as a phenomenological 'whole' in Chapter 7, I now position my study against current debates in the literature. In line with this, in Chapter 8 I highlight the implications which my findings have for the understanding of precarious work experiences and discuss my contribution in theoretical and analytical terms.

Therefore, in Chapter 8 I return to the study's aim and research questions, highlight key characteristics of the precariat concept in the literature and address gaps through my own findings. In the course of this, I also discuss the three precariousness themes identified in the previous chapter and show how they offer utility in better understanding the experiences of workers in low-pay, low-skill work.

This leads me to propose an emergent typology of precariousness, as a phenomenon occurring against the context of precarious work and placed between two opposing categories of experience, these of 'working people' (WP) and 'people in work' (PIW). Building on the evidence for individualised re-construction of precariousness, this typology provides a new conceptual framework against which positive and negative precarious experiences can be mapped.

### *Linking Findings to the Research Questions*

The findings which I discussed in the preceding two chapters challenged existing conceptualisations in the literature and presented the precariousness phenomenon as one which was not determined by contexts but, rather, open to re-construction by individuals. This argument allowed me to return to my aim of understanding the meaning of precariousness, addressed through the research questions, which were formulated as follows:

Research Question 1: Can workers re-construct the (negative) impact which precarious contexts exert on their work-related experiences?

Research Question 2: If workers can re-construct their (negative) precarious experiences away from the determinism of precarity context what factors would enable workers to achieve this re-construction?

Addressing the research questions required an investigation into how precariousness was constructed through the 'intentionality', expressed as the conscious perceptions, experiences and expectations, of precarious workers. Analysis of macro-level data on economic trends was not able to provide this level of focus on the experiences of workers themselves, while the investigation of historical manifestations of precarity led to overlaps with a number of other concepts. This created the need to give voice to individual workers, find-out if they could re-construct their experiences away from the negative determinism of precarity contexts and if so, how. I found the most suitable approach for my investigation to be the use of semi-structured interviews and a 'meaning condensation' analysis. This allowed me to identify the three essential aspects of 'precariousness' outlined in Chapter 7. As a result, I am now in a position to fulfil my study's aim by answering the research questions, linking my study's findings back to the extant literature, and identifying my contribution to the debate.

In line with this, Standing's (2014; 2011) initial construction of the precarious experience could, thus, be summarised by four main premises. First, and despite scope for individual variation, it is a collective, precariat experience, born of a shared and particularly insecure position vis-à-vis work, employment and the labour market, as well as an inferior, stigmatised and 'denizen' status within the State, as per Figure 5 below (Standing, 2015):

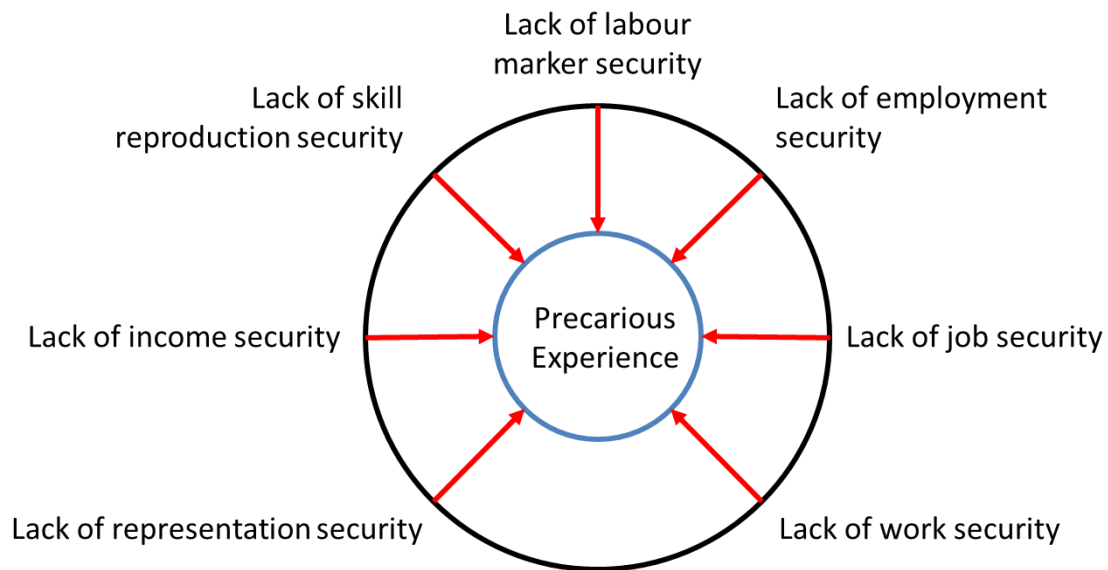


Figure 5: Precariousness as a negative experience through the impact of seven types of insecurity (Table 2, Chapter 2)

Second, this collective precariat experience is determined by the work, employment and labour market structures within which workers are situated, but are unable to change. Mészáros'(1986) interpretation of Marxist alienation theory (Marx, 1981) further explains why that is the case. Thus, capitalist contexts impose worker individualisation and participation in work only to satisfy secondary goals, that is, goals outside of work. In turn, this leads to the commodification of workers and their subordinate position in employment structures, which the atomised socio-economic context of modernity is likely to promulgate (Beck, 2000).

Third, is the move towards 'tertiarisation', that is the merge of work and private lives into a new area of economic activity. 'Tertiariisation', for Standing, is more than a shift to services and is the influx of work-related activities in the precariat's private lives further entrenching the experience of insecurity and commodification (Standing, 2011:38-39). Antunes (2013) also makes this argument by suggesting that when work spreads to take all available free time, it turns into a negative experience.



Finally, the absence of a meaningful professional identity, which Standing (2011) infers from the low-pay, low-skill work members of the precariat participate in, leads to the range of negative experiences already discussed. Tajfel and Turner's (1974) Social Identity Theory discusses the meaning and fulfilment which individuals could gain from participation in a 'social group'. In turn, Verkuyten (2014) warns that the continued inability to access a meaningful social identity could prevent the willingness to seek future 'social group' participation. Contextualised to the precariat, this argument suggests that inability to escape low-skill, low-pay work can not only deprive workers of meaningful experiences in the present but make them reluctant to seek to change their circumstances in the future.

The deterministic and directional causality from precarity structures towards collective insecurity is challenged by commentators such as Doogan (2015) who consider insecurity as capable of manifesting itself separately from the objective reality of work. For him, worker insecurity is complexly framed and could manifest itself in fears of job-loss and so on, despite evidence of labour market expansion and growing tenure growth for both males and females across part-time and full-time employment. Yet, while Doogan (2015) questions the extent of precarity as a condition, he does not query whether the experience of precarious work is necessarily negative, and necessarily one of insecurity. Put differently, Doogan (2015) observes the likelihood of workers feeling insecure within non-precarious structures, but does not explore to the possibility for positive experiences of precarious work.

Standing's (2011:59) own analysis does recognise the existence of exceptions, and refers to those able to benefit from the precarious experience as 'grinners'. For those, work is the instrumental 'means to an end' and they are not in danger of developing 'false consciousness', through believing that their job is more valuable, significant and

worthwhile, than it really is. This is not to say that 'grinners' escape the general insecurity of the precariat but, rather, that they are less perturbed by it than the "groaners. The sense of insecurity, therefore, dominates the experience of both groups and Standing (2011) presents any individual variation almost as accidental, and a non-essential part of the precarious experience. Therefore, the three precariat sub-groups which Standing (2014a; 2014b; 2013) recognises, the 'nostalgics', 'atavists' and 'progressives', are likely to share experiences of insecurity. Thus, those groups largely consist of 'groaners, or, members who are unhappy and unsatisfied with their precarious roles. For them, the context determines the experience and the latter is predominantly manifest in negative terms, as anger, anxiety, and alienation in addition to the overarching sense of insecurity (Standing, 2014; 2011).

Consequently, in focusing on migrants, care, as well as commercial and hospitality groups for my own research I was able to investigate the meaning of precarious work for workers in all three precariat categories, which the above literature is only able to hypothesise about. In addition, I was able to identify moderating factors which were not part of Standing's (2011) precariat model, and which contested some of the key assumptions of his argument.

### *Research Question 1*

As a conceptual starting-point, in Standing (2014a; 2014b; 2013), the 'nostalgics' are socially and politically disengaged migrants. They find themselves in a precarious position on account of having neither a past (lost through migrating from their native countries), nor a present (on account of being denizens in their adopted countries). They are likely to remain inert and passive members of society and only make their voices heard if they feel they have suffered gross injustice. Initially, it seemed that my research supported Standing's argument. I met migrant Gergana who felt her

colleagues and social institutions looked down on her on account of her being an Eastern European. I also spoke with migrant Evgeny who was disappointed with life in Britain and felt that he and his family lacked a 'present' in Britain. Migrant Celeste had been subjected to 'ill-treatment' (Fevre et al., 2012) from her manager, migrant Ivan did not like his job and neither did migrant Liliana. Initially, there seemed to be little scope for 'nostalgics' to re-construct the negative impact of the precarious contexts in which they were positioned.

This also appeared to be the case with the 'atavists', described as former working-class members who had fallen into low-skill and low-paid jobs (Standing, 2014a; 2014b; 2013). Consequently, the contexts seemed to determine the experience of a number of workers in my Cleanwell interviews, with participants in Focus Group # 3 and Focus Group # 4 commenting on the absence of jobs. This was unsurprising, giving the employment history of the British South West, where I conducted my study. Specifically, following a decline of major industries such as mining and fishing over time, the sources of meaningful professional identities for workers also appeared to have declined (BBC, Cornwall - Last Mine Standing, 2014).

Finally, while the 'nostalgics' lacked a past and a present, then Standing's (2014a) 'progressives' are those well-educated graduates who are unable to find employment and, thus, have no future. This attitude appeared central to migrant Liliana's experiences, on account of obtaining a British degree and not being able to find work at the level and status she expected. Once again, the experience of the worker seemed to be locked within the confines of the precarious context, with little scope for individual re-construction.

A more careful consideration of participant narratives in my study, however, highlighted the existence of positive experiences, and the scope to re-construct the determinism of negative precarity structures which was a departure from existing framings. Thus, the dissatisfaction of migrant 'nostalgics' in my sample did not originate in their shared precarious position but was individually constructed. Migrant participants had not lost their 'past' but remained in contact with friends and families in their native countries. They relied on former contacts for help and work and maintained their 'past' by frequent visits back home, where some like Evgeny, Ivan and Maria, still owned properties. Even when present, negative precariousness was not an absolute category manifest in low-skill and low-pay contexts but a relational experience, constructed through individual worker 'sense-making'.

Migrant 'nostalgics' shared both participation in low-skill, low-pay work, and a migrant social status in Britain, yet this by no means led to similarity of experiences. As precariousness was individualised, even the current precarity contexts could be better than life in their native countries. Alternatively, the existence of 'social groups' of fellow migrants could cause migrants to regard their present British conditions as a normal rite-of-passage for newcomers. In those instances, precarity was something which all migrants endured and at the end of which was the hope of a better life. Lastly, although precarious, life and work in Britain offered the opportunity for new experiences, through which migrant 'nostalgics' could learn more about themselves. The precarious experience was complex in its individualised re-construction, which made circumscribing it to pre-existing negative categories difficult.

Equally, regarding the experience of 'atavists' as that of collective insecurity on account of a 'denizen' social (Standing, 2011) and 'outsider' (Emmenegger, 2012) economic position was a simplistic reading of a complex situation. Thus, it would be

erroneous to overstate the impact of the perceived unavailability of jobs and argue that workers are forced into precarious work due to lack of choice. Specifically, since participants spoke of their preference of, for instance, care and hospitality work, over better paid and higher-status office work. It was possible to become a precarious worker on purpose, and in order to find the meaning and fulfilment, absent in other types of work.

Standing's (2014a) model, thus, struggles to accommodate the existence of widespread individuality in precarious experiences. Standing is even less able to explain positive experiences within the 'atavist' category, and is reduced to acknowledging them, but as non-representative of the group. This, however, cannot account for the common experiences of precarious work as a 'family', where there was not only identification with a precarious 'social group', but 'internalisation' (see, for example, Ashforth and Mael, 1989) of its ethos and values. In those instances it was not precarious structures *per se*, nor the dropping-out of the working class which determined the worker's experiences. Rather, it was the access to a meaningful position within a 'social group' and consequently, a meaningful social identity.

Thus, the social 'out-group' of 'atavists' could also be a fulfilling 'in-group', offering access to precarious work as a socialising activity, and an activity more respectable than being unemployed. It was possible that the threat of becoming unemployed made any available work, even precarious work, desirable. Yet, such an explanation needs to take into consideration the individual 'sense-making', which enables workers to compare present realities with alternative scenarios. Once again, the impact of contexts must not be accorded deterministic significance since it is not the context alone but the worker's 'intending' of the context which re-constructs precarious experiences. Consequently, the present situation may be regarded as better than

unemployment but, equally, it could be 'sense-made' in relation to the worker's individual working history, position within their 'social group' and future expectations. The precarity of contexts is of significance but not singularly so.

Thus, the social stigma of precarity structures, perhaps best illustrated through care assistants' awareness of being perceived as 'bum-wipers' was not sufficient to denigrate the positive experience of precarious work. Workers in my sample could find fulfilment beyond the immediate terms of remuneration and gain confidence and satisfaction through their duties, as well as their position within a supportive 'social group'. Was this not a display of 'false consciousness' by workers who tried to feel better about otherwise commodifying and lacking in dignity roles? The worker narratives did not suggest this. A number of workers, among which care assistants Simon, Josh and Susan, nursery assistants Cath and Rebecca, and participants in Cleanwell Focus Group # 2 experienced positive precariousness not just by because they had a job but also, by virtue of being part of a 'family'. Thus, even when the resultant professional identity did not have a high social status, it could still be recognised and respected by members of the group. Furthermore, even precarious work could be a valuable experience of a pedagogic nature. In those instances the workers could feel they were able to follow the path set by their own working parents or, by working themselves, pass on the same ethos to their children. In those instances, the impact of precarious work went beyond the search for superficial meaning and, importantly, workers were able to find not only personal fulfilment but develop their self-esteem through their precarious jobs. This was the experience of 'working people' and I expand on this later in this chapter.

Lastly, while the experiences of 'progressive' precariat member Liliana were of predominantly negative precariousness, she was not the only precarious work

graduate in my sample, and migrants Celeste, Stanko, Ivan and Maria also held Bachelor's degrees. Liliana's experiences were, thus, not the simple outcome of placing an educated graduate in a low-pay, low-skill job. Precarious experiences were not categorical and absolute representations of a given low-pay low-skill reality but, rather, occurring in relation to a discrepancy between the expected and encountered reality. This expected reality could, in turn, be individually 'sense-made' to include a certain social status, a position within a 'social group', or based on comparison with the person's life-history up to that point. In all case, however, it was individually 'sense-made' and, thus, could differ from the experiences of other precarious workers, whether in the 'progressives' group or in general. Thus, for those like migrant Celeste, precariousness became an experience with a pedagogic impact; for migrant Stanko it was preferable to life in his native country, and for migrant Maria, a contributing source for a positive self-concept.

The 'progressives' conceptualisation which Standing (2014a) develops is also one of structural determinism and can, also, be refuted by approaching its central premise from the opposite direction. This is the argument that high-level qualifications and well-paid, high-skilled work, is capable of bringing-about positive working experiences. Thus, while having a professional 'future' could enable worker fulfilment, negative 'progressives' experiences are caused by having the potential, but lacking a trajectory of progression. A number of participants in my 'contrasting' group, however, were graduates working in high-level local government jobs, yet this was not sufficient to usher in satisfaction, or fulfilment. The key reason for this, it seemed, was change and restructure which could expose to precarity even jobs which were, at least nominally, non-precarious. This, once again, reminded that in a modern economic context the stability and security of work are transient and impermanent and, even in

themselves, unable to serve as sole guarantors of positive worker experiences. Even workers in highly-qualified and secure jobs were not able to achieve professional fulfilment since even they could become disconnected from their 'social group' of peers and colleagues. Furthermore, even when they survived periods of precarity through organisational change, they could 'sense-make' their precarious experiences in negative terms in relation to the expected, but in reality lacking employer support. In the instance of HR consultant Sheila this negative precariousness had an additional dimension, as it had made her aware of the proximity between her personal and professional spheres, which Sheila had intentionally kept separate up to this point. The merge, or 'tertiarisation' of the two was, however, not negative in itself but 'sense-made' as such in relation to her expectation to be able to continue to compartmentalise her working and private lives. HR officer Trevor, on the other hand, did not have such an expectation and spoke of his satisfaction and love of his role which, for me, indicated a 'tertiarisation' without a sense of commodification (compare with Antunes, 2013 and Standing, 2011). Nevertheless, like Sheila, Trevor experienced negative precariousness in relation to a divergence between his expectations and reality of work, as well as disconnect from his 'social group'. Trevor and Sheila, therefore, had survived the restructures of their local government employer and had secured new, permanent contracts. Sheila was a high-skilled HR consultant advising Heads of Service. Trevor had a niche HR specialism and was the organisation's expert in his area of HR. Both were educated to degree level and yet, this was not sufficient to remove their negative precariousness. Although they did not share in the circumstances of the 'progressives', Sheila and Trevor shared in their negative experiences.



At the same time, the precarity contexts in which Standing's (2014a) 'progressives' found themselves, did not have to be determinants of negative experiences. Rather than a simplistic function of working contexts, precariousness remained an individualised experience where contexts were 'sense-made' in relational terms, with regards to the 'social group' and as a developmental, pedagogic experience. Thus, for the Local Government group, precarity through organisational restructure was relational to previous experiences (Participant 3), participation in an 'social group' (Participant 1). It could also be a pedagogic experience, allowing workers like admin officer Emma to gain confidence and develop their self-concept through exposure to new experiences and surviving them. Even though Emma's experience was framed in much more positive terms than Sheila's narrative, there was learning through precarious experiences in both cases. Precariousness, thus, was once again a more complex phenomenon that the 'progressives' category suggested.

Thus, in summary of the first research question, my findings suggest that precarious workers are able to re-construct the negative impact of their low-skill, low-pay contexts. This poses a challenge to a number of existing theoretical frameworks of precarity, starting with the experience of collective insecurity, which all precariat members are proposed to share in, to a greater or lesser degree. For my participants, however, insecurity was neither a significant, nor a commonly-shared aspect of the precarious experience.

Rather, precariousness was an individualised and varied experiences both as a result of individual 'sense-making', in relation to 'social group' membership and different expectations of what life and work in Britain would be like. The re-construction of precariousness in relation to personal expectations was not an altogether unexpected occurrence in migrant narratives who after all, had left their native countries in the

hope of finding something better in Britain. In objective terms low-skill, low-pay work did not offer this better environment but, rather, a route into continued precarity. Workers did not, however, construct their experiences based on an objective analysis of employment structures but through a subjective, phenomenological 'intending' of their social and employment contexts. It was in this way that migrant Alexey could be aware of his precarious circumstances which offered an even lower rate of pay than work in Bulgaria and, still enjoy life in Britain which, on the whole, was better than Bulgaria. He was exposed to precarity, but not for the first time, having been brought up in precarious circumstances which, by his own reckoning, had made him 'durable'.

Precariousness could be moderated by the position of the worker within their 'social group' which could lead to the 'internalisation' of its values and, in turn, be experienced in strongly personal terms, as a 'family'. This could also give rise to pedagogic experiences such as that of workers in the care group, who felt they were gaining confidence and maturity through their work. Workers were, therefore, neither collectively insecure, nor moving towards collective solidarity towards their precariat comrades. Their precarity could be identified as a set of shared circumstances, yet this did not mean they had to lead to either shared, or altogether negative experiences. Neither were precarious workers united against the State as a common and overarching Other, since 'social group' membership provided a number of 'out-group' others.

As a result of the above discussion, I am in a position to revise Standing's (2011) original conceptualisation, presented in Figure 5 above, in order to account for workers' capacity to re-construct their precariousness. Consequently, Figure 6 incorporates the insights of my own research and presents the precarious experience

in relational and pedagogic terms, accounting for the impact of ‘social group’ participation.

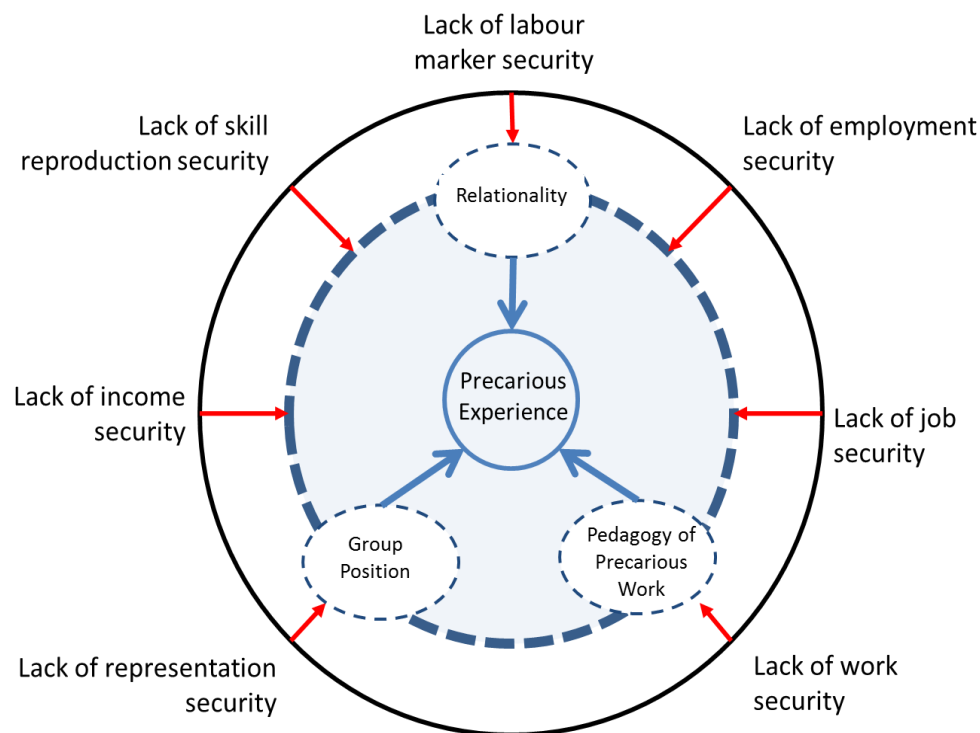


Figure 6: The re-construction of the precarious experience by workers in low-skill, low-pay roles

### *Research Question 2*

Existing conceptualisations of the deterministically-negative impact of precarity structures on precarious workers were, thus, challenged in my findings. Although my study showed no instances of workers being able to change or re-negotiate their terms and conditions, either through individual or collective action, there was certainly scope to re-construct the experiences. Therefore, in specific answer to the second research question, workers in my study re-constructed their experiences through the combined an overlapping use of relational ‘sense-making’ of the present context, position within the ‘social group’ and the pedagogic impact even of precarious work. This did not

mean that precariousness was always positive but did indicate that structures and context were not sufficient to determine worker experiences. Each participant could give different weighting to the three factors and, thus, re-construct their precariousness individually.

Furthermore, the application of those three factors with regards to the personal 'sense-making' of precariousness reflected the distance between the personal and professional spheres of workers. The overlap of 'tertiarisation' (Standing, 2011) was manifest strongly in HR consultant Sheila's narrative, yet Participant 2 in the local government Focus Group and nursery assistant Liz also spoke of having no choice, they had to work in order to live. This presented evidence for the alienation between workers and work in Mészáros' (1986) alienation theory. Importantly, those instrumental attitudes towards work, when it was considered as a means to an end, did not constitute positive experiences in the way Standing (2011) imagined the 'grinners' to have. Participant 3 and Participant 4 in the local government focus group suggested that having an instrumental attitude could prevent precarity from having a negative impact on the worker. Yet, this separation between professional and personal spheres was unlikely to give rise to a meaningful self-concept through work either, the way experiencing work as a 'family' could. This, in turn, challenges Antunes' (2013) premise that proximity between professional and personal spheres, the 'tertiarisation' in Standing (2011) leads to inherently negative experiences. Lastly, in instances where proximity between personal and professional spheres enabled positive precariousness, meaningful membership to a 'social group' was, also, likely to exist. This was the case with care assistants Josh and Susan and nursery assistant Cath. In those instances, the social stigma ('bum-wiping') associated with aspects of their jobs did not prevent the development of a meaningful, professional identity.

The challenge of 'false consciousness' could be levied against those participants, and their positive precariousness explained-away as an effort to find meaning in their monotonous and/or unpalatable routines. I believe, however, that the complex 'sense-making' of precariousness serves to challenge such reductive explanations. For instance, its relational nature allowed workers to consider presents experiences along the continuum of their working histories to date, and not simply as isolated and unrelated episodes. Even in instances where there was a degree of instrumentality, workers could still view their position in positive terms, not in itself, but in offering a means for remuneration, and possible future growth. Thus, precarious work could expose workers to low-pay, low-skill conditions of work, yet for a number of workers this still meant the development of skills and access to pay. This is how workers could feel that just by working they were following the example of their parents who had, also, worked all their lives. Equally, workers were able to pass the ethos of work to their own children. Participation in work, even precarious work could, lastly, be a badge of honour and Cleanwell workers were keen to distance themselves from those who did not work and, even, colleagues who worked part-time and relied on benefits.

The counter to arguments for positive precariousness as 'false consciousness' was also present in second aspect of precariousness, that of the group position. Precarious work did give workers access to a peer group and through this, a professional identity. This professional identity could carry social stigma, but did not prevent it from being a meaningful one within the sphere of work, and within the group itself. Thus, care assistant Josh was likely to be respected as a professional by the relatives of residents he looked after. Furthermore, Josh felt he could challenge the preconceptions and prejudices of others by explaining that he felt his job was important and made him feel better about himself. Josh did not feel he belonged to a stigmatised

'out-group' but, rather, a meaningful and supportive 'social group'. He shared the professional identity of this 'social group', and was sufficiently proud of it, so as to publicly defend it. Membership in work-based 'social groups', thus, allowed workers to distinguish themselves both from stigmatised 'out-groups' such as the unemployed and those on benefits, but also different 'others', for example, groups of white-collar status. Thus, workers in precarious groups prized their precarious but nonetheless working identities, as those identities offered workers not only a means of distinction, but also ready-made social and employment categories. In turn, those enabled precarious workers to develop their self-concepts, and self-categorise in the social world (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004; Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

This explanation challenges the 'insecurity thesis' (Heery and Salmon, 2002; Burchell, et al., 2001), which presents precarious experiences not only as determined by employment structures but also as an inadvertently negative. In my study, precariousness is a complex, personal construct which is not the outcome of structural impact but occurs as a two-way dynamic in which worker experiences can be re-constructed by individuals without recourse to class action. Consequently, the experience of precarious work cannot be directly inferred from the position which they are currently occupying. Unlike insecurity, which in Doogan (2013) could be irrational and unfounded - like the fear of flying, precariousness is neither. Rather, it is formed through conscious phenomenological 'intentionality' on the part of workers towards their working environment. In this sense, in my study I seek to address Fevre's (2007:530) warning of a "legitimation crisis of the theoretical enterprise" with commentators eager to construct explanations in the absence of data or, perhaps even more dangerously, by 'oversimplifying' and 'misrepresenting' data. Accordingly, contextualised to my study, this does not mean that precarious workers could not

experience insecurity, but rather, that the precarious experience required a more comprehensive inspection, before an over-arching diagnosis could be made.

My study's phenomenological framework and method of analysis, accordingly, allowed a comprehensive inspection of worker experiences, rather than making theoretical inferences about them. I was able to observe that the same treatment of the precariat as a homogenous collective (see, for example, Miller and Brewer, 1984), by those who did not belong to it, was reciprocated in perceptions held by precarious 'social groups' themselves. I observed this in precarious groups' attitudes towards external 'out-groups', for instance, the unemployed, who were regarded as an equally undifferentiated unit. Work, even precarious work, appeared a means through which certain status could be attained and protected, and each precarious group differentiated itself from those of lower-than-it status. Precarious groups could, thus, be regarded as fearing 'the unemployed' collective, which presented a risk to the latter's working identity by reminding precariat members of the direction in which they would drift, should work run out. Precarious groups were also capable of bias against differentiated groups engaged in higher-status type of work. As an example, zero-hour waiter Zac regarded office work as boring and uneventful, regardless of any pay, security, progression and other benefits which it offered to those in it. There was no need to aspire to leave his precarious group when it offered a potentially meaningful and fulfilling experience. Even though this did not result in collective, class-consciousness, it could allow the move from 'I' to 'we', according the 'out-group' priority over individual views and behaviour (Sanchez-Mazas and Klein, 2003).

I found no evidence of Cohen's (1980) sub-culture in precarious groups, which I discussed in the earlier stages of the literature review. Precarious workers identified with workplace 'groups', rather than a wider precariat grouping; and had a social, but

not an overarching, class identity.. There was, furthermore, scope for re-constructing the position of the precarious 'out-group' in social perceptions, while acceptance of the stigmatised precariat identity was not the only options available to precarious workers. Workers in professional groups could act in accordance with the group's own, rather than collective, class interest. Thus, when Cleanwell staff spoke of having a good team, or feeling they belonged to a family, they referenced their respective 'social groups', rather than the Cleanwell workforce as a whole. Nevertheless, meaningful position within a group could go beyond a professional, worker-work, relationship, and could be the source of a fulfilling identity, steeped in precarious work. Importantly, this could lead to a positive self-concept through participation in precarious work, rather than an externally-allocated and stigmatised precarious identity.

Work, even precarious work, appeared of significant importance not only as a means of reproducing and attaining goods, but also as an enabler and facilitator of social interaction. Lukács (1983), Mészáros (1986) and Antunes (2013) suggest that work has a positive impact only outside capitalist systems and away from the individualised subordination of labour to capital. In turn, Standing (2011) focuses on the negative impact of specifically low-pay, low-skill work. Contextualised against the 'atomised' backdrop of modernity, the experience of insecurity and commodification should have been pronounced in precarious worker's narratives. This should have been especially noticeable in my sample, comprising the narratives of workers in particularly uncertain, low-pay and low-skill, precarious circumstances. Instead, precariousness was often fulfilling, enjoyable and could be a source of meaningful social identities. This did not mean that lack of representation, training, skill-development, meaningful pay rates, legislative protection, job access and tenure cannot cause the insecurity described in Standing (2011). It did, however, suggest that studying the precarious experience



requires us to re-define our understanding of the relationship between precarity contexts and corresponding experiences. Thus, in rejecting *a priori* assumptions of one-way causality, I observed the continued scope for individual agency, which was used in re-constructing not contexts, but experiences. Certainly, modernity could present a context of inherent risk and insecurity felt both by workers in precarious structures, and those outside them. Yet, it was not exclusively so and the causes for positive and negative precarious experiences went beyond the context of precarious work as an objective set of terms and conditions.

Thus, my study led me to look at worker 'intentionality' as the cause for re-constructing precariousness vis-a-vis the three themes already discussed. This was a transition from individual 'parts' to participant experiences as a 'whole', that is, understanding of the precarious experience phenomenon as a 'manifold', in all its parts and across all its structures (Sokolowski, 2000:25). Specifically, this was a definition of precariousness as worker 'intending' of the distance, proximity or separation, between personal and professional spheres, which could enable precarious workers to develop a positive self-concept. This argument required the development of an alternative explanatory framework for the types of re-constructed worker experiences. In turn, this alternative led me to develop a typology of precarious experiences, discussed in greater detail below.

### *Understanding Precariousness through an Emergent Typology*

As already discussed, the experience of precarious groups is individually constructed by the workers within them. This could enable a re-construction of present experiences of precarity in relation to previous ones, and this re-construction was moderated by the 'social group' and the pedagogic impact of work. Precariousness

is, thus, a complex phenomenon, which enables worker participation in group identities without necessarily being affected by the social stigma associated with them. Through this, precariousness could give workers access to an already constructed socio-economic position, as well as access to pre-formed opinions, behaviours and values through which to improve their self-esteem and construct their self-concepts (Deaux and Burke, 2010).

This, in turn, created the need for an alternative model, in order to represent and explain precariousness against the distance between professional and private spheres. This distance is represented through phenomenological 'intentionality' and is, thus, a result of worker perceptions, views, as well as experiences of work. As HR consultant Sheila and the narratives in the local government focus group showed, this distance is dynamic and subject to change in line with changes in worker 'intentionality'. In my model (Figure 7 below), changes in the distance between personal and professional spheres are manifest as changes in the type of precarious experiences. I have already argued that precariousness can manifest itself as both a positive, as well as negative experience. In my model, I group positive experiences in the right-hand side of the horizontal spectrum, and place them in the category of 'Working People'. This is the 'intending' of work spheres in close proximity to a worker's personal sphere and is represented by the overlap between the blue personal and black working sphere in the right-hand side of Figure 7. Negative experiences are, in turn, placed in the left-hand side and discussed as the experiences of 'People In Work'. This category presupposes separation of the two spheres, yet it is possible to enforce proximity (depicted through the red professional circle on the left) and when this occurs, it can have the negative impact narrated by HR consultant Sheila.

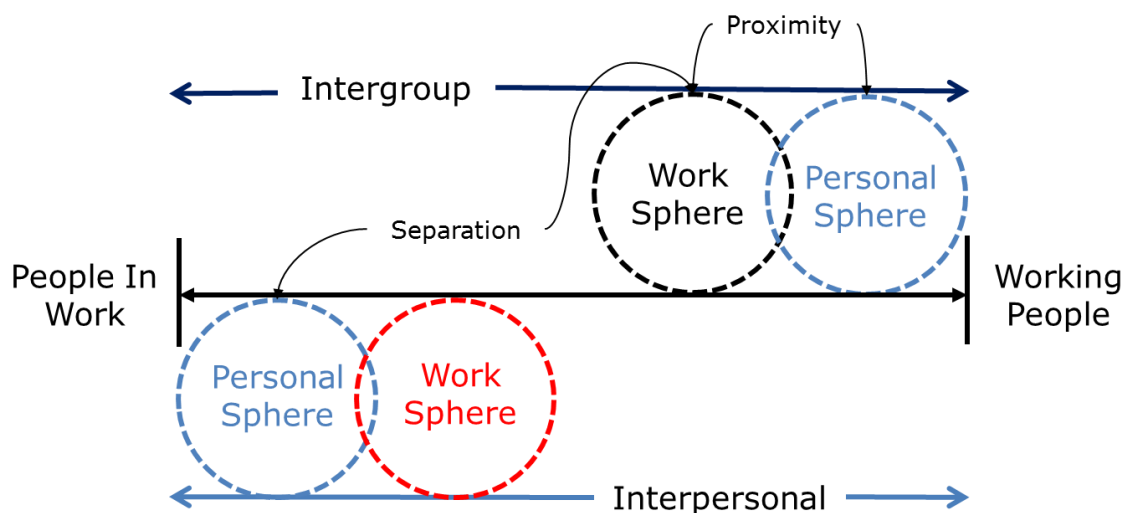


Figure 7: A representation of the distance between workers and 'work' as a result of phenomenological 'intending'

In Figure 7's schematic representation of the emergent typology, I add an additional dimension, which I propose in line with SIT's discussion of interpersonal and intergroup behaviour (Haslam, 2001; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Respectively, this is the difference between workers behaving as individuals, and as members of a 'social group' and can be demonstrated with, for example, the narratives of HR consultant Sheila and care assistant Josh. In accordance with SIT, identification with a group can enable a worker to show positive bias against the 'social group', and overestimate the difference between him or her and an 'out-group', this level of group membership is likely to engender assimilation of the group's ethos, also. For this to happen, it is necessary for the worker to 'internalise' (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) the group's values. In my sample I observed this in the 'family' metaphor in worker narratives and was associated with the 'intended' proximity between personal and professional spheres. This did not have to automatically carry the negative consequences of 'tertiarisation' and the proximity between work and the worker enabled the latter to develop a positive self-concept through participation in work. It was, thus, the experience of 'working

people' in my typology for whom precarious work was a valuable, worthwhile and fulfilling activity.

In turn, when the proximity between working and personal spheres was enforced, or the result of a lack of choice, it could lead to negative precariousness and 'people in work' experiences. Experience at this end could also be produced by the 'intended' separation between the two spheres, which precluded the use of work as part of the worker's self-concept. At this end of the spectrum workers were likely to engage in interpersonal behaviour and not internalise the values and ethos of their professional 'social group'.

The spheres are presented by dotted lines, through which I seek to show that both personal and professional spheres are integrated and part of the worker's Lifeworld. The ends of my typology could, in turn, be described as referring to the difference between the 'person in work' as a person who *does work of a certain type*, and a 'working person', as someone who has internalised the values of his or her 'social group' worker. The latter experience could lead to the worker becoming an interchangeable member of the social group (Haslam, 2001) and a *worker of a certain type*. Only in instances of 'working people' types of experiences, therefore, is this work-based identity also internalised, not only accepted by the worker, but used in the development of his or her self-concept.

The framework in Figure 8 below illustrates how these concepts are linked to participant narratives, and the understanding of the meaning of precarious work as per my study's aim.

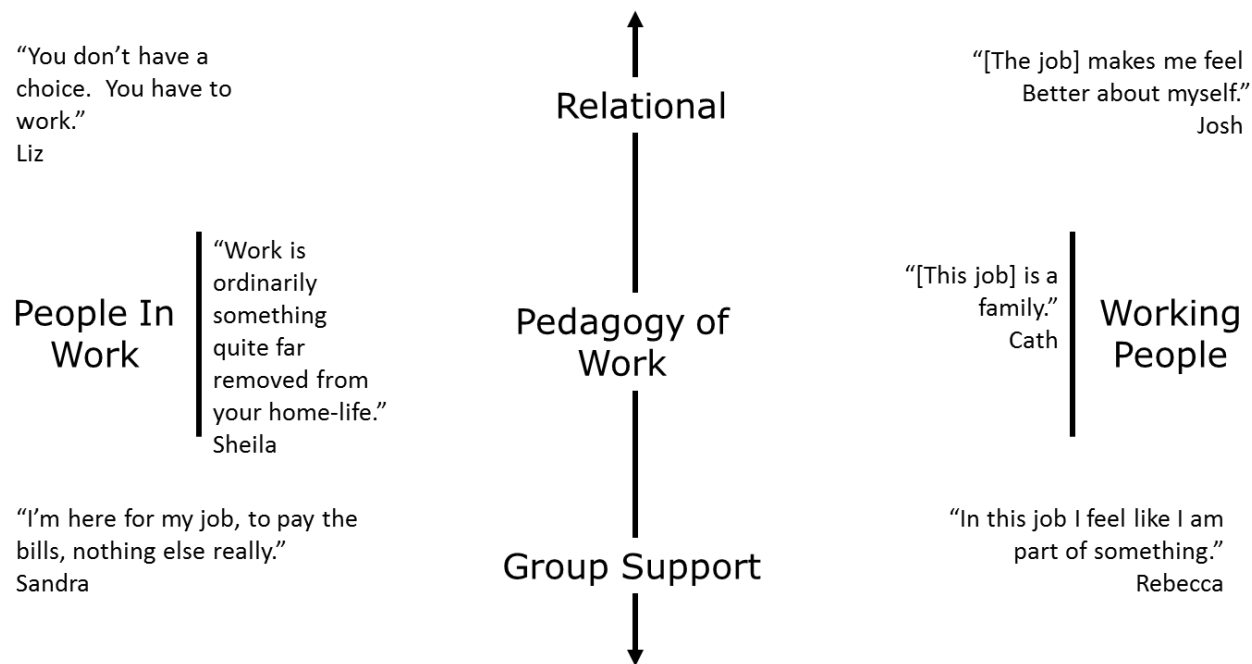


Figure 8: Linking the PIW-WP typology back to participant narratives

Investigating participant narratives led me to conclude that the more central the position of work within a worker's life, the stronger its influence on worker experiences. This presented a different perspective on HR consultant Sheila and nursery assistant Liz's experiences. Specifically, it suggested that while they could be negative on account of failing to cause a positive self-concept, this could also be caused by the imposed proximity between personal and professional spheres. Proximity between the spheres magnified the 'intended' impact of work on the worker and, in their case, the impact was a negative one.

Conversely, greater distance means that work-based experiences are likely to affect the person on a lesser level, while making them unlikely to improve their self-esteem and, through this, develop a positive self-concept. Thus, the 'intended' remoteness between work and the worker is less likely to lead to the construction of a self-concept, but the amplitude of negative experiences is also less likely to affect the personal

sphere of the worker. This was specifically exemplified in the narratives of local government focus group workers, as well as migrants Celeste, Gergana and Stanko, and could be identified in admin officer Emma's story, also. Prior experiences could, thus, have a conditioning effect (pedagogy of precarious work) over workers and lead to regard work as inherently transient, and not holding sway over the personal lives. This separation, in turn, appeared to inoculate them against the insecurities of redundancy, restructures and other threats to employment.

The PIW-WP typology is, however, dynamic and enables individual movement between 'people in work' and 'working people' experiences. At times, as with HR consultant Sheila, this could be caused by external circumstances but there is, also, scope for worker agency. Migrant Liliana, for instance, chose to actively distance herself from her work and, instead, aligned with the UK graduate 'in-group'. Even migrant Gergana's *guzarka* identity showed disassociation with care work and active refusal to incorporate care work as part of her own self-concept. Consequently, she chose to distance herself by 'sense-making' work and the associated professional status through an alternative identity which poked fun at what she did, and was in line with Gergana's 'here for the money' 'intending' of work.

### *Contribution to Knowledge and Study Approaches*

In order to analyse the impact of my research on the study of precarious experiences, I now contextualise my findings against current knowledge and approaches in the literature.

Returning to my study's aim of understanding the meaning of precarious work, it was my purpose was to understand if workers can re-construct their precarious experiences away from the determinism of their precarity contexts and if so, what

enabled them to do this. However, there was disagreement among researchers on whether current economic conditions led to growing or decreasing precarity. The impact of contexts on experiences was taken for granted, which meant that 'precarity' was a complex construct. My review of the literature highlighted a range of historical manifestations which, nevertheless shared common ground and presented precarious experiences as predominantly negative. Thus, 'precarity' broadly referred to the overarching worker subordination within labour structures, a definition with heavy ideological and social theory undertones. This was not so much an analysis of current realities but the application of Marxist theory to the specific context of low-pay, low-skill work.

'Precarity' was, thus, an ambiguous context which could apply to a number of conditions. For instance, it could be a stand-alone term describing an ontological state of being (Butler, 2003), a collective position vis-à-vis labour, work and the State (Standing, 2011; Bourdieu, 1998) or a category of low-pay, short-term work (Doogan, 2013; Shildrick et al., 2012). The term had also crossed over from the narrow academic application observed in Barbier (2004), to mainstream media use (Figure 4, Chapter 2). The social theory connotations of the term, however, meant that in applying it, researchers were making inherent assumptions about the position and type of experiences of workers in certain contexts.

Thus, I approached my own research of precarious workers from a different angle, which enabled me to return to 'the workers themselves'. I sought to understand the meaning of precarity, as constructed by the workers to whose experiences it related. As a result, I developed an alternative framing of the term, focusing on the experience itself, as 'sense-made' by the workers. Thus, the experience of precarity was no longer structurally determined by external employment conditions, nor the source of a shared

experience of precarity, collectivising alienated denizens into a 'class-in-the-making' (Standing, 2011; 2014). The precarious experience was not subservient to structures of low-pay, low-skill and short-term work. It was not simply a category of employment terms and conditions, neither a precursor to shared precariat consciousness, nor merely an indication of worker subordination, synonymous with insecurity and uncertainty.

Using a phenomenological methodology, my interviews allowed me to understand the meaning of precariousness as differing from accepted literature conceptualisations. It became a phenomenon in which workers 'intended' the distance between themselves and their contexts in relation to past experiences, position in the social group and pedagogic impact. This produced as a range of positive and negative experiences and had the potential of enabling workers to achieve a meaningful self-concept through precarious work. Precariousness was not exclusively commodifying, alienating and isolating, nor necessarily united workers in class-like collectives. This conceptualisation reinstates the significance of worker agency, and challenges discourses of all powerful employers exploiting their workforces in laissez-faire market structures. Despite perceptions of diminished scope for worker agency and choice against market forces of supply and demand, and re-emergence of Marxist narratives of subordination and commodification of labour, the work experience was still contingent upon the worker. Why were workers unwilling to use this agency to resist their commodification, if they had the agency to do so? The answer to this is two-fold. First, workers in the 'working people' category were not resisting their commodification, because they were not commodified. For them, work was meaningful and an integral part of their self-concept, and they were not interested in changing their contexts. Second, workers in the 'people in work' category were not



interested in changing work as, for them it was something separate from their lives. It was a means to an end and their focus was on those external-to-work ends. What of participants like HR consultant Sheila and HR officer Trevor? At which end of the spectrum did they belong? They belonged at neither, for their exposure to precarity had ended at the point of being able to secure new permanent contracts with their organisation. Nevertheless, the three aspects of precariousness could be used to study their experiences at the time of change, when they both faced the possibility of being made redundant. Whether realised or not, the exposure to precarity caused Sheila and Trevor's position to experience pedagogic precariousness and change their 'intending' of their own position vis-à-vis work. This may result in PIW separation from professional and spheres should they encounter precarity again, and similar to the participants in the local government focus group. Alternatively, they may find future precarity less negative in relation to their original experiences, or may experience better support from their 'in-group' of peers.

Thus, precarious experiences do not occur in idealistic isolation, and I do not adopt a solipsistic explanatory framework. Although contingent upon them, precariousness is not solely determined by the present condition of the market, the terms and conditions of employment, access to, or even availability of welfare policy, despite those having an impact. The precarious experience is not absolute but relational, not collective, but individual. By the same token, it is neither solely enforced by the present context, nor exclusively manifest as a psychological state. Precariousness is an experience of the present context of work, but draws on previous working experiences, position within the 'in-group' and is pedagogically conditioned by the worker's up-bringing, example of parents, and so on. It, thus, cannot be reductively explained away as 'false consciousness', as in experiencing it, workers do not solely 'intend' the present context

of work. Furthermore, as a term steeped in Marxist theory ‘false consciousness’ is unable to deal with worker experiences, except in negative terms. That is, as an instance of worker subordination through the use of false meaning imparted on them in capital structures (see also, Standing, 2014; Lukács, 1983; Engels, 1893). This does not mean to say that it is not possible for workers to show ‘false consciousness’, especially in the context of low-pay and low-skill work. Rather, I propose that ‘false consciousness’ be used to describe one of the potential outcomes of precarious work associated, for instance with the experiences of some precarious workers (people in work), as opposed to all precarious groups.

Precariousness is, thus, a differentiated and definable experience referring to the distance between precarious workers and precarious work. It is not a sub-category of insecurity, either through short-term work (Doogan, 2013); or reduced access to training, representation, skill development and so on (Standing, 2011). Consequently, precariousness refers to complex but definable range of experiences, removing the need for terminological ambiguity in the literature. Precariousness is a phenomenon identifiable in itself, rather than a component parts other explanatory approaches. In this sense, my study’s main contribution is the theoretical conceptualisation of precariousness, which is neither a diagnosis of labour market trends, nor a reductive description of their impact on worker experiences. Precariousness is the action of conscious worker ‘intentionality’ towards his or her precarious working environment and, thus, has the capacity of being an act of agency, capable of providing meaning and self-esteem, rather than simply alienation. As such, precariousness is a phenomenon constructed through the ‘intending’ of precarious contexts. This, in turn, grants it a place in the workers’ Lifeworld, which it enters through the very act of

conscious 'intending' to become a phenomenological 'part' of the Lifeworld's intersubjective 'whole'.

In line with this argument, the framing of the precarious experience can be amended as per Figure 9 below, which regards precariousness as occurring along the PIW-WP typology:

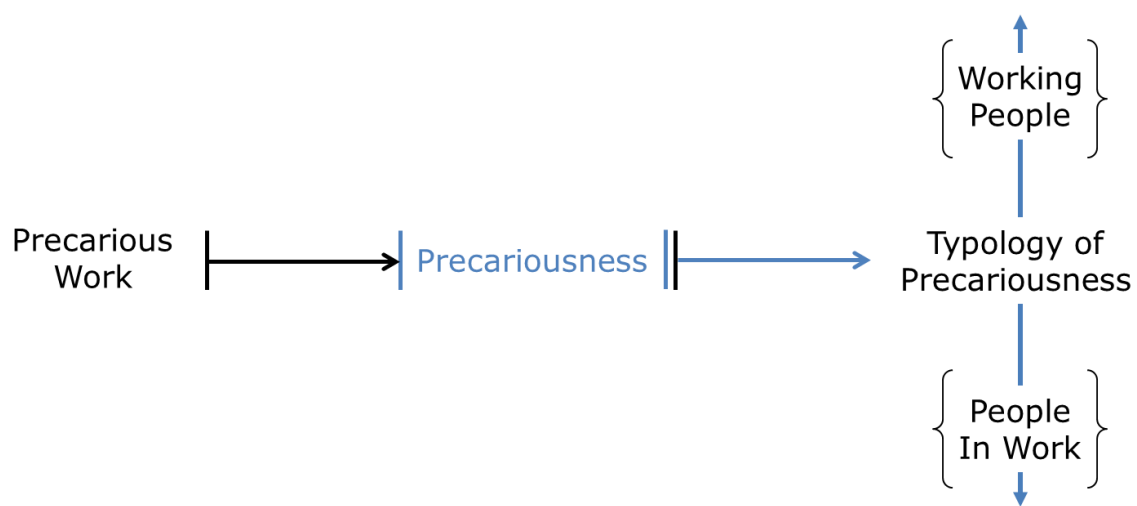


Figure 9: The phenomenological 'intending' of precarity contexts, resulting in precariousness as a range of positive and negative experiences

Precariousness becomes the source of identity through participation even in precarious work and provides a source of both 'social group' membership, and between-group differentiation. Importantly, the strength of this identity is not impeded by the precarity of the working context, nor the social stigma which may be associated with it. As a result of this, precarity does not lead to collective solidarity on an occupational or class-basis. Precarious work can bring workers together in an 'in-group' but also divides this 'group' from 'out-groups', even within the same working context. The class unity of the proletariat has, thus, given way to the differentiated, precarious 'social groups'.

These considerations should serve to 'normalise', in the sense of de-mystify and de-stigmatise the structures and experiences of precarious work. If low-skill and low-pay jobs can offer workers a sense of meaning, social participation, and a positive self-concept, then the focus of policy makers should not be on trying to get workers out of precarious work. The presence of choice is important, and offering access to training and development, the way the Nursery, Care Home and Cleanwell in my sample did, could equip precarious workers with the skills to develop in line with own preferences. Nevertheless, the assumption should not be made that all precarious workers are keen to up-skill themselves and 'escape' the constraints of their current working environments. Rather than stigmatise and condemn precarious worker as giving rise to a class of denizen workers who are about to rise and overthrow their oppressors, the focus should be on improving their current circumstances.

This does not necessarily have to include an increase of wages, even though workers would doubtlessly welcome the implementation of the Living Wage. Yet, positive changes to improve worker experiences, could move them from the 'people in work' towards 'working people' end of the spectrum. Practical measures may include the establishment of staff-feedback mechanisms which to allow two-way communication between different levels of the employment hierarchy. This would especially benefits workers, who like Cleanwell employees feel they are not always listened to and when they are, their views are not always heard.

As the precariat are not a homogenous body with developed internal solidarity, it is important to treat each individual worker fairly and in accordance with company policies and procedures. Membership to a group of precarious workers, thus, does not prevent individual workers from noticing favouritism shown towards other colleagues, or experience lack of equity. This puts the onus of accountability on

managers and supervisors, and employers need to ensure that not only are there suitable policies in place but they are enacted in the behaviours of those in authority.

Although under-utilized in the literature, my phenomenological methodology and 'meaning condensation' method of analysis offered significant utility. The choice of research strategy also enabled the widening of participant population by considering acceptable not only direct experiences of precarity, although prominently present in this study. It also allowed me to utilise the expectations, attitudes and fears of all participants who had, at some point, 'intended' precarious work. This approach, further, points to a suitable direction for future research, as well as the need to increase the category of precarious work. Consequently, I see the debate as moving to include experiences of unemployed, including second and third generation unemployed, the illegally-employed, and those who have not yet been employed. As I write this in May 2016, there continue to be reports of a 'refugee crisis' with large numbers of migrants seeking asylum in EU states. Despite likely to be in their thousands, Britain has not, as yet, committed to a 'cap' on the migrants it is willing to give refuge to. The seriousness and severity of the situation clearly goes beyond the sphere of work, yet at some point in the future those migrants would also seek entry and integration into the British labour market, and compete for available jobs. This will, in turn, create the need for investigating the precariousness of refugee workers in a British employment context, recognising the impact of their prior experiences, identities and expectations of work participation.

### *Summary*

The purpose of this discussion chapter, therefore, was two-fold. It sought to, first, situate my findings within existing literature and second, demonstrate their contribution

to knowledge through the conceptualisation of precariousness and the explanation of its occurrence and moderation, through the PIW-WP typology. The typology is based on the 'intended' distance between the precarious context, and worker experiences of this precarious context.

Consequently, precariousness is not a collective experience but the outcome of individual 'intentionality'. It is not a function of employment contexts as per Standing's (2011) framework, nor a psychological state which can manifest itself in separation from contexts, the way insecurity can. Relatedly, precariousness is not a predominantly negative experience, whether explicitly so through alienation and commodification; or implicitly, through 'false consciousness'. Rather, I construct precariousness as the dynamic 'intending' of contexts by workers, a phenomenon occurring between the professional and personal sphere of work.

In addition, precariousness is 'sense-made' through and, in turn, moderated by, three essential factors, that of relationality, precarious pedagogy and position within the 'social group'. Accordingly, the aspect of relationality challenges the determinism of external structures and points to the lasting significance of worker agency. Thus, workers 'intend' precariousness in relation to previous experiences and future expectations. Options are not always present, and workers are not always able to move between jobs, yet this does not take away worker scope for re-constructing their experiences, in positive or negative terms.

The conceptualisation of precariousness as a pedagogic experience explicitly connects with earlier perspectives on labour and its scope for being a meaningful and fulfilling, indeed, personally-formative activity. Literature perspectives, however, reject this possibility for capitalist contexts, or precarious jobs, which were likely to take-over

personal lives, turning workers into commodities. My study challenges these discourses by pointing to the positive impact which proximity between personal and professional spheres could have on workers. Specifically, this could lead to the development of a positive self-concept rather than always cause subordination, anomie or alienation.

The significance of the 'social group' position challenges narratives of negative precariousness through an absent professional identity. Specifically, it shows how precarious experiences (and social stigma) can be re-constructed through 'group' support. The latter could also enable a professional identity to be developed even in conditions of precarious work. This aspect shows that while precariousness is individualised, it does not have to isolate the workers experiencing it, nor unite them into a collective, developing class solidarity and consciousness.

Understanding the meaning of precariousness in this way necessitated an alternative explanatory framework which regarded precariousness against the context of the worker-work relationship. This resulted in my proposing a new, PIW-WP typology placed between the categories of 'people in work' and 'working people'. This typology incorporates the three themes of precariousness above, and frames precarious work through the phenomenological 'intentionality' of precarious workers, towards their working environment. Consequently, while precarity could be measured and quantified objectively, precariousness extended beyond this objective context and towards the full gamut of worker experiences, attitudes, expectations, hopes and fears.

My choices of a phenomenological methodology and a 'meaning condensation' method of analysis, offer particular utility in incorporating the range of participant experiences, and retaining worker centrality in answering the research question. It,

further, diverges from macro-analysis approaches in the existing literature, in line with my recognition that a new framing and terminology (precarity-precariousness) requires a new approach.

Lastly, my study challenges potential one-size-fits-all policy interventions which may be aimed at alleviating the precariat's collective lot, and I contest precariat loyalty to an eponymous 'rising-class'.



## CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this, final chapter is to revisit the key arguments in this thesis, show how my findings address the study's aims, answer the research questions and contribute to existing debates. I also consider the implications and some of the limitation of my research, as well as suggest the direction of subsequent studies.

Chapter 9, therefore, concludes my study by returning to my argument for precarious workers re-constructing their experiences away from the determinism of precarious contexts. I argue that workers are able to do so by 'sense-making' precariousness as relational, pedagogic and moderated by membership in the 'social group'.

Then, I move to point to a number of implications proceeding from this argument. My conceptualisation of precariousness as an individual, rather than collective experience challenges narratives of a precarious class-in-the-making, capable of collective solidarity and class-consciousness. Furthermore, the possibility of positive precariousness serves to contest prognoses for growing resistance and discontent among low-skill and low-pay workers, rising to overthrow the oppression of capitalist structures.

Next, I discuss some of the limitation of the study, stemming from its specific South West of Britain context with its specific political make-up and lack of strong union organisation. The absence of unemployed workers in my sample is, also touched upon.

I propose several directions for future research and conclude the chapter on a personal note. Specifically, I apply the study's findings to my own working history and consider my own trajectory along the 'people in work' - 'working people' typology.

### *Key Findings and Implications*

My study into the experiences of precarious work has been led by the aim of understanding precariousness, as underpinned by the below research questions:

Research Question 1: Can workers re-construct their (negative) precarious experiences away from the determinism of precarity contexts?

Research Question 2: If workers can re-construct their (negative) precarious experiences away from the determinism of precarity context what factors would enable workers to achieve this reconstruction?

I structured my investigation through the narratives of workers across three 'typically' precarious groups, those of migrants, care workers (nursery and adult care), as well as commercial and hospitality employees. In turn, those were triangulated through the use of a 'contrasting' group consisting of Local Government and CIPD participants.

Thus, I am now in a position to take a side in the precarious work-debate by answering the first of my research questions with a re-sounding 'yes'. One of the key findings of my study is that precariousness, the experience of precarious work occurs on a spectrum of both positive and negative experiences. Thus, it was possible for workers to regard precarious work as a means to an end, enabling a lifestyle (as with migrant Stanko), the payment of debts (migrant Gergana), the payment of bills (care worker Liz) and being a stop-gap until something better appeared (waiter Larry). Those attitudes, however, did not have to automatically lead to wide-spread commodification, alienation and insecurity of precarious workers. In line with my emergent typology, the attitudes of the above workers could be presented as the experiences of the 'people in work' group, who 'intended' their personal and professional spheres as inherently separate. In those instances the relationship between precarious work and precarious

workers could be described as the Marxist notion of alienation (Mészáros, 1986; Lukács, 1983; Marx, 1981). Since this was the participation in work in order to achieve goals outside of work, it should have been an instance of the worker's self-centred individualisation and led to a range of negative experiences (Standing, 2014; Standing, 2011). One of those was the commodification of workers, that is, the loss of humanity and turning into an object, a commodity. There was, however, no evidence of such negative experiences for workers 'intending' work as 'people in work'. For them, precarious work was separate to their personal spheres and, thus, happenings at work were less likely to impact their personal lives, or to have a personally-significant meaning.

Conversely, it was possible for workers to have positive experiences even within precarious structures of work. This was the case with migrant Alexey, care assistant Josh, nursery assistance Cath and Rebecca, waiter Zack and participants in Cleanwell Focus Group # 2. Was this not 'false consciousness', imposed on the workers by their managers as a means of subordination? I do not believe this to be the case. 'False consciousness' could be a strategy enabling workers to find meaning in tedious and repetitive activities such as cleaning and serving, not to mention some of the unpalatable aspects of care, described by workers such as migrant Gergana and care assistant Josh as 'bum wiping'. It, however, is insufficient to explain narratives of work as a 'family', a social duty and a responsibility, which is both inherited from parents and passed on to children. Lastly, it is an inadequate account of the relationality of migrant narratives, which compared precarious work in Britain with previous experiences in their native countries, as well as individual hopes and expectations of a better life. Through this, 'false consciousness' carries the ideological assumptions

of Marxism and, unable to explain fulfilling experiences of precarious work, deals with them by denying them.

Standing's (2011) original construction of the precariat and subsequent clarifications (Standing, 2014; 2013) are also developed on a Marxist foundation and, thus, share the same assumptions of negative worker experiences. This is how Standing (2011) develops his model of general precariat insecurity, alienation and anxiety. While Standing (2014) acknowledges the existence of positive experiences among precarious workers, he chooses to explain them either as caused by instrumental attitudes towards work (a means to an end), or down-playing their extent and significance. Positive experiences were, however, both significant for participants in my research, and extensive. They were manifested in the treatment of the workplace as a family, a source of meaning, fulfilment and, even, professional identity. This did not mean that precarious workers were unaware of the social stigma associated with their work. This came across especially strongly in the narratives of care assistant Simon, care assistant Josh and migrant Gergana. Nevertheless, the social stigma did not impede the respect and recognition which the professional group could accord to its members. Importantly, even where social stigma existed, precarious workers could 'intend' their professional spheres as being personally significant and central to their own lives. In those instances, precarious work was no longer something to *do*, but something to *be*. Thus, having accepted and internalised their precarious identities, workers like care assistant Josh, nursery assistant Susan and nursery assistant Rebecca could experience positive precariousness at the 'working people end of the spectrum. Furthermore, in opposition to the subordination and commodification envisaged by Marxist theory, they could develop their self-concept through precarious jobs. Once again, in line my emergent typology, this was caused by the 'intended'

distance between the personal and professional spheres, where work-based experiences had a significant personal impact.

Thus, the construction of precariousness in my study rejected the one-way determinism of context upon precarious worker experiences. Precariousness was no longer a function of the level of pay, access to representation, scope for progression and development as Standing (2011) suggests. Neither did it occur in isolation from the context of work, however, and could not be reduced to a subjective psychological state the way, for example, insecurity could (DeWitte and Naswall, 2003; Sverke and Hellgren, 2002). Precariousness was, thus, the 'intending' of precarious contexts by precarious workers. Although the act of phenomenological 'intentionality' encompassed both experiences and expectations, the phenomenon was manifest against the reality of precarious work, albeit non-deterministically.

This, in turn, led to my answer to the second research question I posed in my inquiry. Workers could re-structure the negative impact of precarious structures because they did not regard their current precarious experiences in isolation but, rather, as a continuum of both past experiences and future intentions. Thus, rather than they 'sense-making' their present circumstances in absolute and categorical terms, they regarded them as relational. This could be relationality to what had gone before as in migrant Alexey's case, or with regards to what their expectations of the present were, as per migrant Evgeny's narrative. Precarious work could be assessed in relation to the absence of work altogether and, thus, become a pedagogic experience. Nursery assistant Susan spoke of becoming more mature through her job, while her colleague Cath spoke of being less inclined to 'pull a sickie' in this job than previous office jobs. It could be a means to follow in the example set by parents as per the participants in Cleanwell Focus Group # 2, or an ethos to pass on the worker's own children, as per

care assistant Leanne's narrative. The South West of Britain context was significant here, as was participants' frequent reference to the absence of jobs. Precarious work, thus, became more than a means to pay bills but also a source of distinction and status, this time between the worker as an economically-active individual and the undifferentiated mass of others such as the 'unemployed' and those on benefits.

Miller and Brewer's (1984) application of Social Identity Theory offers three types of interaction between 'in-groups' and 'out-groups', where 'categorical' contact refers to one group regarding the other as an undifferentiated unit of workers sharing similar characteristics. My findings challenged this homogeneity of precariat experiences assumed in the literature, yet showed the precariat's capacity for differentiating themselves from other groups, while treating others as homogeneous categories. This was significant not only in terms of scope for intra-precariat differentiation, which I discuss below, but also in relation to the importance of the social group as the third, and final factor which enables workers to re-structure the negative impact of their contexts. Here, the 'social group' could be the carrier of social stigma, and still be a locus of meaningful personal relationships, as per the 'family' theme above. However, while the 'social group' could provide a socialising aspect to the precarious experience, it did not have to engender collective worker solidarity by virtue of a shared place in the labour market. In line with this, workers were able to adopt 'social groups' with a degree of abstraction (Haslam, 2001). In turn, those enabled them to differentiate themselves from their actual social groups of co-workers the way migrant Liliana, migrant Gergana and workers in Cleanwell Focus Group # 1 did.

The application of those three factors (relationality, pedagogy of precarious work and 'social group' position) not only enabled workers to re-construct their precarious experience, but ensured the latter remained individual, rather than collective. I did not

observe the presence of collective worker consciousness, or awareness of collective subordination. The complex process through which precariousness is 'sense-made' specifically prevents collective solidarity, since the shared consciousness would require not only a common working history in relation to which to compare present circumstances. It would also require common future goals and position within the group. Even if those factors were all in place, the pedagogy of precarious work would allow for variations in the social conditioning received from parents and grandparents which to moderate the individual impact of precariousness.

This has a number of implications for the treatment of precariat groups in social research. Re-engaging with precarious-work studies published after I completed my own research suggest that Standing's (2014; 2011) view of a commodified and exploited precariat is still present in the literature. Specifically, this is the argument that precarity structures necessarily lead to a range of worker insecurities (Siegmann and Schiphorts, 2016; Vono de Vilhena, et al., 2016; Prosser, 2015) and the likelihood of civil unrest (McKeand, 2016; McDowell et al., 2014). These arguments are present in Standing's (2011) original argument, which views the precariat as a 'dangerous class', posing a threat to social and economic structures. I was, however, unable to detect signs of those dangers among the participants of my study. While able to avoid the atomisation and individualisation of modernity through participation in 'social groups'; precarious groups were differentiated and capable of prejudice not only against 'out-group' but also, members of their 'in-group'. Participants in Cleanwell Focus Group # 2 disparaged those colleagues who they considered to be 'born moaners', as well as those claiming benefits. There was also differentiation in the attitudes towards work with Cleanwell workers like Participant 1 (Focus Group # 3)

bemoaning the lack of 'transparency', while participants in Cleanwell Focus Group # 4 expressed their satisfaction with company provisions.

Standing (2011) sees the precariat as a 'class-in-the-making' which, although currently prevented from acquiring class-status on account of its absent collective consciousness, could do so in the future. This, however, is challenged by the Marxist theory on which Standing (2011) builds his argument. Lukács (1983) specifically discusses the acquisition of class-consciousness of the proletariat as a gradual 'praxis'. Consequently, class-consciousness is not a 'substance' present from the very beginning but, rather, a characteristic which manifests itself gradually and, thus, is not a sufficient reason for the 'class-in-the-making' but not-quite-a-class tag. Standing (2015) also argues that the precariat is a 'class-like' in relation to the State as an Other, yet this opposition was not evident in my participant's narratives. Thus, perspectives regarding the precariat as a group of workers about to become class-conscious and collectivise against their common enemy, presented an end-point in a trajectory. This, however, was a trajectory participants in my study did not follow. For them, precariousness was individualised and complexly re-constructed the negative impact of precarity contexts. What is more, for those in the 'working people' end of the spectrum it was a positive experience which made them unwilling to seek changes in their working circumstances.

Those considerations, once again, point to the significance of my study's contribution to the understanding of precarious work experiences. Consequently, I am able to not only challenge the assumed determinism of precarity structures on precarious experiences, but also reveal the lasting significance of worker agency, even in low-pay, low-skill conditions. This agency did not lead to a reification of contexts, yet it enabled workers to re-construct their own experiences of those contexts and, in my



view, this is just as significant. Specifically because, by doing so, workers were able to find meaning and fulfilment even in precarious employment. Through this they could develop their self-esteem and find work-related happiness in contexts predominantly described in terms of alienation, commodification and enslavement.

Furthermore, even precarious work emerged as a significant activity in all senses of the word. First, as an activity through which precarious workers, the new Sons of Martha felt needed and valued for their 'service' (Kipling, *The Sons of Martha*, 1, 28). It did not matter whether this appreciation was by society at large, or only their colleagues, customers and families. Second, as an activity, which allowed precarious workers to feel they were participating and contributing members of society, able to fulfil both their employment, and ethical duty to work for a living. Last, as an activity through which they could develop a recognisable social identity, access the support of a 'social group' and rediscover their inherent human dignity.

Also of significance are the implications of my study for current knowledge on the well-researched subject of precarious work. Rather than adopt current assumptions and regard precarious experiences through an ideological filter, I wished to hear the voices of the workers themselves. This led me to reject existing discourses of commodification, alienation and wide-spread insecurity as no longer reflecting the experiences of individual precarious workers within the reality of modern workplaces. This did not mean that conditions of precarious work were abolished but rather, that corresponding experiences could no longer be inferred from the objective evaluation of contexts. Worker narratives in my sample suggested that individual precarious experiences were complexly- constructed and could not be subjected to reductive explanations of ideological nature. While always contextualised against low-pay and

low-skill structures, precariousness could be positive, meaningful, offering scope for worker fulfilment and enabling workers to participate in society on an equal footing.

### *Study Limitations and Future Research*

The above discussion, nevertheless, highlighted a number of other limitations, which I acknowledge and examine below.

Thus, the South West of Britain as a location for the study has a unique history of labour organisation, specifically, through the ‘tribute system’ through which miners were paid. Consequently, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s high-levels of trade union organisation, the mining force in the South West lacked the collectivisation of the rest of the country. Payment under a ‘tribute system’ meant that each group of miners were not employed by the mines but, rather, self-employed workers working for a percentage of the total value of mined ore (Geevor, 2009). As a result of this, rather than unionised against their employers, groups of miners were in competition with each other and had individual, rather than common interests.

The context of the South West was, thus, one which lacked a history of organised trade unionism, which could impact on precarious workers’ unwillingness to come together as a class. This could explain the lower-than-national-average levels of trade union participation in the South West (ONS Labour Force Survey, 2014). Carrying out this investigation in other parts of Britain may, thus, indicate that precarious workers hold different attitudes to collectivisation. At the same time, a number of participants in my study were migrants and, thus, did not share in the employment history, nor had the same background as other South West employees. This, in turn, offered a degree of mitigation to the geographical limitations of my study and upheld my ability to comment on what precariousness meant for my participants.

Another limitation is my adoption of Standing's (2011) precariat framing which focuses only on those in low-pay, low-skill work. This, however, disregards a number of other groups which can experience just as much social stigma, as Standing's (2011) precariat. Having contextualised my research's findings against existing literature and pointed to the study's contribution to better understanding of the 'precarity' and 'precariousness' constructs, I am in a position to point how I can move on by asking better questions.

However, since a PhD investigation is by its nature a focused examination of a particular topic, in this case the meaning of precarious work, I have been unable to utilise the full gamut of available sociological perspectives, nor regard the subject of my investigation from all possible angles. As a result, the next limitation of my study, is of theoretical nature, namely, the decision not to utilise models of 'dirty', 'tainted' or 'stigma' work (Goffman, 1990; Grandy, 2008; Ashforth et al., 2007) and instead focus on the dynamics of group support and their impact on worker experiences and self-concept formation (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Furthermore, I do not discuss the notions of 'employee voice'; scope and choice behind employee 'exit' from groups and organisations; or 'false consciousness' in detail. Although aware of those constructs, I chose not to accord them a prominent place in the fabric of my investigation, for two reasons. First, they did not emerge as significant themes in my participant narratives and second, they are either a part of my research design (phenomenology according 'voice' a primary role in meaning construction) or are unable to account (specifically in the instance of 'false consciousness') for the positive constructions of work that I encountered. It is also important to note that my findings point to precariousness being re-constructed on the individual, rather than collective, class-consciousness level. This further supports my choice not to restrict my study's

narratives to the negative spectrum of experiences accommodated by the 'false consciousness' construct.

In line with this, I believe there are a number of new issues which have emerged as a result of my investigations, and which I will seek to address in subsequent studies. I have tried to co-construct the employment experience through narratives of a varied range of participant groups who may be placed within the notional precariat (migrants), on its verges (cleaners, caterers, carers) and outside it (local government workers and CIPD members) it. Accordingly, the 'working people – people in work' typology sought to offer an explanatory model for experiences and attitudes across those groups and towards precarious work, incorporating and moderating the context of employment terms and conditions through worker 'intentionality'.

What of the migrant workers themselves? Do different nationalities exhibit different attitudes or have different expectations of life and work in Britain? Participants in my sample were predominantly Bulgarian and, although varied in the time they had spent living here, was the time spent in Britain likely to affect their experiences and attitudes?

What of illegal workers, working in unsupervised and exploitative conditions in parallel with the 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain Marx described? Reports (for instance, Dhariwal, 2009) on the continued existence of sweat-shops in the UK, masked by several levels of contract chains suggest that research into the experience and attitudes of workers in those conditions could be approached through the PIW-WP typology.

What of immoral, stigmatised and 'tainted' workers' such as meat-factory workers, sex-workers, animal-testing company employees and abortion-clinic nurses (McMurray and Ward, 2014)? Standing's (2011) precariat model excludes those workers and as a result, they were not included in my investigation. Nevertheless, the widening of the

precariat group to populate the intermediary stages in the PIW-WP typology would require engagement with, and understanding of the experiences of the full range of stigma-bearing occupations.

What of the unemployed and even second and third generation unemployed? Is it necessary to consider different categories of unemployment and study the resultant experiences comparatively? Standing (2011) regards the unemployed as a group in their own right and places them below the precariat in his hierarchy of socio-economic groups in the UK. The unemployed, regarded as 'those on benefits,' were one of the discernible 'out-groups', subject to various degrees of disparagement, from pity to contempt, by the precarious groups in my sample. It seems that the same bias and stigma attached to the precariat in media representation and social opinion also apply to the unemployed. Participant narratives constructed benefits recipients as a homogenous mass of workers which, in line with SIT and Contact Theory, were deemed to share the group's stigma characteristics, without scope or room for individual differentiation. Specifically, they were considered as possibly dishonest, more than likely lacking in personal pride or sense of social responsibility, but also in missing out on the fulfilment and satisfaction of 'honest work'. If so, they are a group more closely matched to existing framing of the precariat than the precariat themselves. A group who, through potential inability to form a work-based identity and imposition of social stigma from external to itself groups may experience not only anger and alienation but existential anxiety (Sartre, 2003). In phenomenological terms this anxiety is not the same as fear, for instance, of continuing unemployment, but a more fundamental state of being whereby a person simply does not know how they will feel in a certain situation. It can be argued, therefore, that the more limited an individual's experiences are, on account of reduced access to work, the more likely

they are to experience fundamental and unsettling anxiety, affecting all aspects of their lives. Reduced access to formative experiences, in turn, means a reduced array of benchmarks against which to sense-making present or potential (future) scenarios, increasing the level of anxiety when encountering them. As a result, the significance of present working conditions on the formation of a meaningful self-concept is even greater. This, therefore, also offers a suitable environment for the application of the PIW-WP typology.

Lastly, what of the labour implication of the challenges which the UK faces, such as the potential 'Brexit' from the EU? What of Islamic State refugees seeking asylum, and after this, meaningful employment in the UK? Apart from lack of clarity on numbers at the time of writing (May, 2016), the skill-profile of those migrants who are granted access and leave to remain to the UK is also unknown, making the investigation of their position vis-à-vis other UK labour market groups necessary. As a consequence, their position and framing of work will require better understanding in order to facilitate their integration in the market. Once again, the PIW-WP typology can offer a starting point.

Taken together, the findings, knowledge and experiences of this study have transformed my approach to, and perspective on what sociological research is and what it means to all parties involved in it.

A crucial point of departure when starting subsequent research would be that of bracketing my researcher preconceptions at the point of carrying-out interviews, in line with the phenomenological *epoche*. Based on my learning from this study, I will take into account, but desist from inferring worker experiences from the current set of economic indicators on inflation, tenure, under-, over- and unemployment. Equally, I

would be unwilling to start at the level of collective experience, apart for the purpose of pragmatic definition of a possible population from which to draw a research sample, all the while aware of individual variation.

Another important consideration based on the experience I have gained from the current research, is the difference between intended and available respondents. Access to groups over the course of my research was often problematic even when I was granted organisational access. Negotiations with employers were often lengthy and I was required to strike the balance between not letting my research fall off the potential participant's radar, and being aware that my project is not likely to be their top priority. Finally, even when access is granted as was the case with a large NHS Trust, there could simply be a lack of participant interest, despite several rounds of invites sent to staff by their senior managers. I learnt that no matter how important a piece of research was for the researcher and even for those being researched, it was but an imposition to the already busy participant schedules and not everyone was able, or willing, to make the time.

### *Lessons Learnt*

With this in mind, the success of future research into precarious work-related experiences and attitudes, for the purpose of mapping against and extending my emergent typology would rest on several key factors.

First, given the significance of studying the views, perceptions and experiences of hard-to-reach groups, it is important to solicit the help of a gatekeeper to gain access to participant groups. This, however, is not sufficient to develop trust and confidence with participant, nor place them at sufficient ease to enable a study of their personal and professional experiences of work. I found that a way to achieve this in my study

and, thus, overcome the participant-researcher boundary was to communicate with participants on their own terms. Accordingly, I spoke Bulgarian when interviewing Bulgarians participants, and was reminded of the importance for researchers to take all possible steps in accommodating the needs and requirements of participants, rather than *vice versa*. Not only did this provide for richer and deeper narratives but accorded participants the place of co-researchers and stakeholders in the study.

Second, there is the need to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate set-backs or changes. I was in contact with the local branch of the CIPD and in the process of arranging an HR focus group, when the branch's representatives stopped responding. This was another example of reaching an impasse without any particular reason and without any explicit refusal to participate. At the same time, a number of the would-be-participants were attending a CIPD Diploma course and I was able to combine a guest lecturing slot introducing my study, with a focus group.

Third is the need to communicate the study in clear and non-technical term. This point was problematic for my own investigation and I am grateful to my supervisors for pointing out that what I thought were attention-grabbing information posters were, in fact, full of PhD-speak and academic jargon, less likely to be read than a flat-packed furniture assembly sheet. As the research progressed I, therefore, adopted an approach of dual quality check, and would disseminate to colleagues, consider and possibly implement suggestions, before sharing with my supervisors. This enabled me to make efficient use of my supervisors' time and, in turn, usually resulted in quicker responses.

In conclusion, and having considered contribution to knowledge, as well as areas of investigation opening-up as a result of this contribution, I feel it important to



acknowledge a final, unintended (in the sense of being unexpected) consequence of my research. Put in terms of my emergent typology, at the beginning of this study, I saw myself and my own identity as completely separate to those workers, whom I was intending to interview. I tried to actively disengage and, effectively, forget about my own experience of precarious work. Not only in the analysis stage where the phenomenological *epoche* required a bracketing of researcher preconceptions but in terms of the path which had brought me to this study. Throughout the initial stage of this investigation I was a 'person in work', and I regarded work as an activity which had always been a means to an end. On first arriving in Britain, I was working to finance my Open University degree studies, then, I worked so as to enable me to stay in Britain and because the terms of my visa required me to be in work. Since obtaining my citizenship and before commencing my PhD, I worked to provide for my family.

Nevertheless, as my PhD investigation progressed, and as I reflected on the narratives of different worker groups, seeking to consider them from multiple perspectives and through the phenomenological 'imaginative variation', I was increasingly becoming aware of my own 'voice'. I accepted the significance of my previous experiences, acquired as part of different precarious 'out-groups' along the course of my career as well as the symbolic 'in-group' of Bulgarian friends and family at home. I no longer identified with the positivist researcher ideal of axiologically-empty objectivity, nor could feel its pull beneath the surface. The unexpected consequence of my study, therefore, was discovering that whether or not its findings were generalisable, they became 'personalisable'. That is, they applied to me also, and helped me make sense of my own experiences as a Bulgarian migrant, formerly engaged in seasonal work and currently working under a zero-hour academic contract.

I had regarded my choice of the phenomenological paradigm, qualitative strategy and 'meaning condensation' analysis as a stepping-out of the 'black and white' room in Frank Jackson's (1982) philosophical argument which referenced a scientist with no empirical experience of the world, only theoretical knowledge. To me, it represented an effort to 'intend' (in a phenomenological sense) precarious work from the perspective of my participants. I wished to learn and understand it by speaking to the workers themselves, capturing their authentic 'voices' and allowing them to construct and sense-make their own experiences. Yet, I had failed to appreciate that in doing this, I was learning not only about the construction of work experiences, but also about how knowledge itself was constructed. Consequently, and having gradually found my own position within the typology of work experiences, I became more confident and willing to assert it. I had become a 'working person' who had constructed my self-concept through participation in precarious work.

This led me to accept the utility and validity of my own work-related experiences and assumptions. I saw them as being an ontological and axiological part of my worldview, shaping my identity as a person and a worker. When meeting new people, I accepted my position and started responding to 'what do you *do*?' questions by stating: 'I *am* a researcher'. What is more, this empowered me to re-discover and accept the precarious experiences which had structured my own identity. I realised that these working life experiences did not limit or define me; on the contrary, they developed and diversified who I was. They were enriching, not commodifying, and did not alienate me from society but helped me belong.

Experiences on the PIW-WP typology are, however, dynamic and as I complete my studies I face the challenge of precarious work once again. This experience is not one of existential anxiety, nor insecurity but, rather, a return to the 'person in work' end of

the scale. I view this transformation as a result of my gradual exit from the 'in-group' of PhD peers, and further caused by the prolonged isolation and autonomy of PhD research and limited access to University structures, on account of being a precarious, zero-hour associate lecturer. What once seemed a career-defining experience within an institution I had considered my *Alma Mater*, increasingly looks as the first of potentially numerous, precarious engagements and contracts. Yet, unlike the scientist in Frank Jackson's (1982) philosophical argument, I have not studied precariousness from the confines and safety of a 'black and white' room, but in full exposure to the experience. Through this, I have learned about myself and no matter whether my future roles are precarious or not, I hope they will help me better understand who I am.

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## APPENDIX A: QUESTION SHEET

### Migrants only:

- Why did you decide to move to the UK?
  - *Probe: Were there any issues at home? Any particular expectations you had?*
- How do you feel about life in the UK?

### All:

- Could you tell me a little about what you do?
- Why did you take up this job?
- How do you feel about your current working environment?
  - *Probe: has anything changed? What impact if any does it have on your life? What did you expect of the job?*
- How do you feel about your employer?
  - *Prompt: have your views changed since starting? How would you describe your relationship with the employer?*
- How do you view/perceive your colleagues?
  - *Prompt: Have your views changed since joining? How would you describe your relationship with your colleagues?*
- Thank you and in conclusion – any else you wish to discuss?

## APPENDIX B: VIGNETTES

### GRAHAME THE COUNCIL MANAGER

Grahame is a 40 year-old manager, employed by a rural Council. Married and a father of two, he is currently struggling to fit family time in his busy week. The Council employing Grahame is under-going a number of changes as a result of budget cuts, imposed by Central Government. There is a Council-wide drive to achieve efficiencies, which includes redundancies across the board. Grahame's work-load has been increasing over the past year, which also saw his team shrink from 10 to 7 people. This hasn't translated in a pay-rise. Grahame has tried to bring-up the matter with his superiors on a number of occasions, but was told he ought to be 'glad he has a job'. His colleagues are beginning to comment on how tired and fed-up he looks, to which he agrees, explaining that he is having to do 50+ hour weeks and is still nowhere close to getting on top of his work. When his wife asks him why he stays in the job, Grahame responds that he has no other choice but to 'grin and bear it'. He seems resigned to the fact that there simply is 'no work out there' and thinks that if he leaves, he will not find a comparable job in the area.

#### General questions

1. What are your first impressions of Grahame's experience?
2. What do you find most striking?

#### Specific questions

1. What effect are the changes likely to have on Grahame?
2. How do you find the suggestion that he should be "glad he has a job?"
3. Why do you think comments are made about the way he looks?
4. Why aren't his managers picking-up/doing something about this?
5. What do you think prompts Grahame's wife to ask why he "stays in the job"?
6. What do you think about his reasons to stay?
7. What is likely to happen next if he continues in the same way?

### Andy the Factory Worker

Andy works in a meat-processing factory. His contract is for 35 hours a week and pays him an hourly wage slightly above the minimum. This is not Andy's dream job, but he has, so far, been unable to find better work. Andy and his girlfriend, Rachel, are trying to save for a house deposit, but Rachel was recently made redundant from her position as a secretary and now does shift-work at a hotel in a neighbouring town. Unable to keep-up rent payments or get any benefits, they've had to move in with her parents, until Rachel finds a better-paid job. The whole experience has made Andy angry with the state support system which, for him, 'has got it all wrong'. He is often heard commenting on how 'the Government allows migrants to come to the UK, gives them houses for free and lets them live off benefits'.

Rachel has tried explaining that there are several foreign workers at her hotel who are all hard-workers and seem grateful just to be given a job, but for Andy, this is a case in point. It shows how immigrants are ‘coming-in, stealing jobs and being entitled to everything’. Andy feels that whilst there are immigrants willing to work for low pay, workers like him won’t get a chance to earn a ‘decent wage’ and get on in life.

### General questions

1. What are your first impressions of Andy’s experience?
2. What do you find most striking?

### Specific questions

1. Why is Andy not able to find better work?
2. What do you think his strategy for finding better work is?
3. What do you think about Andy and Rachel having to move-in with her parents?
4. What do you think about the state ‘getting it all wrong’?
5. What do you think about Andy’s views on immigrants and opportunities?
6. What do you think about Rachel’s views on immigrants and opportunities?
7. How do you feel Andy’s wage?

## *Maryia the Care Assistant*

Maryia is an Eastern European nurse in her later 50s. She moved to the UK 5 years ago and now works as care assistant in an old people’s home. Maryia is substantially over-qualified for the low-skill type of work she does and currently earns less than she did in her native country. This is not a problem for her though, as she gets on with colleagues and residents. She is not looking to change, or trying to find a better-paid job. When asked by residents if she enjoys being ‘over here’, Maryia answers that life in the UK is ‘good, because she doesn’t have to worry about anything’. She lives within her means and is happy to take on all the extra hours offered to her. Maryia doesn’t drink, doesn’t go out and buys only the bare necessities. Apart from annual visits to her home country, she hasn’t been away from the town where she lives and works. Despite her low wage, working in the UK over the past 5 years has enabled her to save enough to buy a flat for her daughter back home. She looks forward to reaching state pension age, when she plans on moving back home and draw her UK pension from there.

### General questions

1. What are your first impressions of Maryia’s experience?
2. What do you find most striking?

### Specific questions

1. How do you feel about Maryia's choice of work?
2. What do you think about the effect this has on UK job availability?
3. What, in your opinion is the effect this is likely to have on UK workers?
4. Why do you think Maryia thinks life in the UK is "good"?
5. What do you think Grahame (vignette #1) and Andy (vignette #2) would say about that?
6. How integrated in her surroundings do you think Maryia is?
7. What do you think about her intention to move back and draw her UK pension from her home-country?

## APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

I confirm that I have read and understand the information in the Participant Information Sheet and have had the opportunity to raise any questions with the researcher.

Yes ☐

No ☐

I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

Yes ☐

No ☐

I understand that my responses will remain anonymous during analysis and in publications.

Yes ☐

No ☐

I understand that findings from the project may be shared with my supervisors, may be published, but that in any event the identity of participants will remain confidential.

Yes ☐

No ☐

5. I confirm that I agree to an audio recording of my interview being taken and that I am happy for the researcher alone to have access to this recording for the purpose of note taking and analysis.

Yes ☐

No ☐

Participant Name:.....

Date:.....

Participant Signature:.....

Researcher Name: Constantine Manolchev

Date:.....

Researcher Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. Manolchev', written over a horizontal line.

## APPENDIX D: INFORMATION SHEET

### What is this?

You are invited to take part in a study exploring social perceptions and employee experiences of modern working environments. The research is carried-out as part of a PhD in Business with Management at Plymouth University and is the first to investigate this in the South West. To inform your decision whether to participate or not, this information sheet seeks to explain what it will involve. Feel free to recommend the study to others who may be interested in taking part.

### Who is doing it?

The research is carried out by Constantine Manolchev. I am a PhD researcher and an associate lecturer with the Graduate School of Management at Plymouth University.

### Do I have to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you will need to sign a consent form to indicate you are willing to be a part of the study. Even after signing the form, however, you will be free to withdraw at any time before the completion of the transcript coding in September 2015 .and without giving a reason. A decision not to take part, withdraw part-way or after participation will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, your data will be destroyed and would not form part of the analysis and reporting for the study.

### I am happy to take part – what's involved?

You will be asked to take part in a focus group, made up of members of your organisation and discuss three different work experience stories, which will be provided. The conversation will last approximately 40-60 minutes and will be recorded. This is necessary in order to help me analyse the discussion later on, and to ensure I haven't missed anything you say. Our conversation will give you the opportunity to draw on your personal experiences or observations of current and previous working environments.

### Is it confidential?

You are assured that everything you say will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your audio file of our conversation will be destroyed after I have analysed it and written up my study. A paper record [transcript] will be kept, however, all information which could identify you, or others you may mention will be excluded, and the transcript edited to ensure no one can be identified. All records will also be analysed and stored in compliance with Plymouth University's Ethics Policy and Data Protection 1998 legislation.

**If you would like to take part, please get in touch:**

E-mail: [constantine.manolchev@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:constantine.manolchev@plymouth.ac.uk)

Mobile: [provided]



## CHANGES FOR THE WORSE, OR CHANGES FOR THE BETTER...

According to some reports, our working environment has been changing for the worse.

- ❖ Over 1'000'000 workers are employed on zero-hour contracts (Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development, 2014).
- ❖ Over 1'000'000 workers are underemployed and would like to work longer hours than are currently available at their workplaces (Office for National Statistics-ONS, 2013).

Despite this, other reports suggest that it is not all bad news.

- ❖ More employees (61%) are likely to strongly agree or agree that their work is secure in the current workplace (Work and Employment Relations Survey 2011);
- ❖ Employment continues to rise and unemployment to fall (ONS, 2014).

### ...WHAT DO YOU THINK?

You are invited to take part in a PhD research project, exploring worker perceptions, views and observations of modern working environments.


The research will consist of a single, face-to-face conversation. It won't be a Q&A session and you are not expected to provide specific answers to specific questions.

Instead, I would ask you to share your experience of your current job by describing what you do, your reasons for applying and plans for the future.

This study is important, as it seeks to counter-balance one-sided and negative media portrayals of flexible, part-time and shift-work. This research is important, as the first of its nature to be carried-out in the South West.

**To take part, please e-mail the address in the top left corner. Thank you for your time.**

# APPENDIX F: APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Faculty of Business Academic Partnerships</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Faculty Research Ethics Committee</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL OF RESEARCH</b></p>		<b>(For FREC use only)</b>													
		Application No:													
		Chairs action (expedited)	Yes/ No												
		Risk level -if high refer to UREC chair immediately Cont. Review Date	High/ low  / /												
		Outcome (delete)	Approved/ Declined/ Amend/ Withdrawn												
1.	<b>Investigator/student</b> *Note:1 Constantine Manolchev		Student - please name your Director of Studies or Project Advisor: Professor Duncan Lewis, Dr Richard Saundry and Course/Programme: PhD Business with Management												
<b>Contact Address:</b> Postgraduate School of Management, Room 004, Mast House, Drake Circus, Plymouth, PL4 8AA															
<b>Tel:</b> [PROVIDED]		<b>Email:</b> constantine.manolchev@plymouth.ac.uk													
2.	<b>Title of Research:</b>  Experiences of Insecurity in Changing Employment Environments: Precarious Work vs Secure Employment Stereotypes														
3.	<b>Nature of approval sought</b> (Please tick relevant boxes) *Note:2  · PROJECT: <input type="checkbox"/> a) PROGRAMME <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (max 3 years)  If a) then please indicate which category:  <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td>Funded/unfunded Research (staff)</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Undergraduate</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>MPhil/PhD, ResM, BClIn Sci</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Or Other (please state)</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Masters</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>			Funded/unfunded Research (staff)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Undergraduate	<input type="checkbox"/>	MPhil/PhD, ResM, BClIn Sci	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Or Other (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Masters	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Funded/unfunded Research (staff)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Undergraduate	<input type="checkbox"/>												
MPhil/PhD, ResM, BClIn Sci	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Or Other (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>												
Masters	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>												
4.	<b>Funding:</b>  a) Funding body (if any): Plymouth University  b) If funded, please state any ethical implications of the source of funding, including any reputational risks for the university and how they have been addressed. *Note: 3  None anticipated. The research will be carried-out in order to fulfil the requirements of a PhD scholarship, funded by Plymouth University and due to be completed by 30/09/2016.														
5.	<b>a) Duration of project/programme:</b> *Note: 4  The interview stage of the research project which is anticipated to run from December 2014 to September 2015.														
	<b>b) Dates:</b>														

6.	Has this project received ethical approval from another Ethics Committee? No a) Please write committee name: b) Are you therefore only applying for Chair's action now? No
7.	<b>Attachments</b> (if required)  a) Application/Clearance Form Yes / No b) Information sheets for participants Yes c) Consent forms Yes d) Continuing review approval (if requested) Yes / No e) Other, please state:
<p>*1. Principal Investigators are responsible for ensuring that all staff employed on projects (including research assistants, technicians and clerical staff) act in accordance with the University's ethical principles, the design of the research described in this proposal and any conditions attached to its approval.</p> <p>*2. In most cases, approval should be sought individually for each project. Programme approval is granted for research which comprises an ongoing set of studies or investigations utilising the same methods and methodology and where the precise number and timing of such studies cannot be specified in advance. Such approval is normally appropriate only for ongoing, and typically unfunded, scholarly research activity.</p> <p>*3. If there is a difference in ethical standards between the University's policy and those of the relevant professional body or research sponsor, Committees shall apply whichever is considered the highest standard of ethical practice.</p> <p>*4. Approval is granted for the duration of projects or for a maximum of three years in the case of programmes. Further approval is necessary for any extension of programmes.</p>	

8.	<p><b>Aims and Objectives of Research Project/Programme:</b></p> <p>The study seeks to address a gap in research on experiences of precarious work, starting with conceptual ambiguity of 'precarity' and 'precariousness' as a distinct constructs, separate from frameworks of risk, uncertainty, fluidity, economic violence and precarity</p> <p>Dominant discourses seek to establish a causal relationship between precarious terms of employment (low pay, non-permanent contracts and so on) and worker insecurity. The simple acceptance of this causal link is, however, problematic. Precarity is described as a pre-dominantly economic situation, whilst "insecurity" is a psychological construct with cognitive and emotional manifestations: fear, anxiety, stress. Insecurity, in other words, is a subjective experience, based on numerous factors from the surrounding environment – not just employment.</p> <p>The research aims to test the role of several additional factors from this surrounding environment, developed from the literature on social identity and contact theory, including worker agency and support networks. Specifically, it would look for examples of experiences in worker narratives, where social support and choice have been able to moderate the impact of precarious circumstances.</p> <p>The overarching objective of the study is to critique precarious structures, through individual 'voices' emancipated through in-depth, semi-structured interviews.</p>
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9.	<p><b>Brief Description of Research Methods and Procedures:</b></p> <p>The Faculty Research Ethics Committee is requested to approve the undertaking of approximately 50 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with two groups of participants, reached through convenience sampling and voluntary choice to take part (see section 10a on informed consent below).</p> <p>Group one will be made-up of Local Government employees. It has been selected as, apart from County level changes, its functioning will be affected by the Care Act 2014, which is the biggest restructure of care provisions in the UK for over half a century. Participant narratives from group one will be used to determine if imposed change can create insecurity despite security of employment terms.</p> <p>Group two will consist of Bulgarian immigrants who were reached through a Facebook group and who have made the decision to move, live and work in the UK. Each interviewee would be asked to recommend others who may be interested in participating and their employment is expected to vary across a number of care and manual labour sectors. These participants may not be fully versed in English and my native speaker proficiency in Bulgarian will enable me to capture their voices and experiences of elective change to understand whether choice and control over personal circumstances has empowered them despite an arguably subordinate employment position. Once again, informed consent and detailed information sheets (see attached) will enable me carry-out the investigation in an ethically-compliant manner but also fulfil my duty of care and offer information of organisations (such as ACAS, Citizens' Advice, the Migration Network) they can go to should they have any concerns regarding their experience as a result of the interview.</p> <p>I will digitally record all interviews and transcribe them manually, coding themes provided by the literature on precarity, risk, social identity and insecurity - an approach which has been alternatively referred to as categorical-content analysis and qualitative narrative analysis. Audio files will be kept on a password-protected University-provided laptop and destroyed on completion of transcription. Paper copies will be stored securely on campus in a locked environment with the key held solely by the researcher.</p> <p>Sample interview questions are intentionally kept flexible/open to allow workers the opportunity to direct the conversation into areas of their own interest:</p> <p><b>Background and Choice</b></p> <p>Could you tell me a little about your professional background? Why did you apply for your current role?</p> <p><b>Change (Elective and Imposed), Current Work (Insecure or Not), Networks</b></p> <p>Is your experience of this role typical of other teams/organisations you have worked in? Could you talk to me about your experience of change whilst in this role? <i>Probe: what has changed since you have been in it? How does it make you feel? What aspect of your job would you change and what aspect do you miss?</i> How do you feel about your current working environment?</p>
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*Probe: what impact if any does it have on your life? Any aspects of work/developments you are worried about or pleased about?*

How do you view/perceive the organisation?

*Prompt: have your views changed since starting? Have you ever sought support from your employer in a problematic situation? How would you describe your relationship with the employer?*

How do you view/perceive your colleagues?

*Prompt: Have your views of your team change since joining? Have you ever sought support from your employer in a problematic situation? How would you describe your relationship with your colleagues?*

Thank you and in conclusion - what amount of control do you feel you have over your future career?

*Specify subject populations and recruitment method. Please indicate also any ethically sensitive aspects of the methods. Continue on attached sheets if required.*

10.	<p><b>Ethical Protocol</b></p> <p>Please indicate how you will ensure this research conforms with each clause of the University of Plymouth's <i>Principles for Research Involving Human Participants</i>. Please attach a statement which addresses each of the ethical principles set out below.</p> <hr/> <p>a) Informed Consent:</p> <p>Each consenting interview participant will be provided with an information sheet outlining the below information on aims, objectives, process, personal impact and confidentiality. It will also cover the right to withdraw and wording is provided in section 10c) below. After each participant has read the information sheet, I will request them to sign two copies of the consent form, one of which I will keep and file safely in a locked environment and one – I will leave with them.</p> <p>Please refer to the provided information sheet for local government employees and migrant workers for further details.</p> <hr/> <p>b) Openness and Honesty:</p> <p>This study will not use deception, covert questioning, environment manipulation or any other technique in contravention to the principles of open and honest interviewing.</p> <p><i>Note that deception is permissible only where it can be shown that all three conditions specified in Section 2 of the University of Plymouth's Ethical Principles have been made in full. Proposers are required to provide a detailed justification and to supply the names of two independent assessors whom the Sub-Committee can approach for advice.</i></p> <hr/> <p>c) Right to Withdraw:</p> <p>The information sheet contains the following wording:</p> <p>Participation is entirely voluntary. If you do decide to take part, you will need to sign a consent form to indicate you are willing to be a part of the study. Even after signing the form, however, you will be free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision not to take part, withdraw part-way or after participation will not affect you in any way.</p> <p><i>Note that this section should also clarify that participant's data will be destroyed should they withdraw, in accordance with best practice.</i></p>
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d) Protection From Harm:

I am aware that in carrying out this research I am not only acting as a representative of Plymouth University but obtain privileged access to personal experiences and intend to take all reasonable precautions to safeguard participants, and fulfil my duty of care.

The participant information sheet contains the following wording:

**Is it confidential?**

You are assured that everything you say will be treated with strict confidentiality. All audio files made during the study will be destroyed upon its completion. A paper record [transcript] will be kept, however, all information which could identify you, or others you may mention will be excluded, and the transcript redacted to ensure anonymity. All records will also be analysed and stored in compliance with Plymouth University's Ethics Policy and Data Protection 1998 legislation.

As seen from section 9 above, interview questions are kept intentionally non-specific/open to allow participants control over topics and information being imparted. If however, any personal details (for instance names) emerge in the narrative, I will ensure those are edited from the transcript.

I will keep a relaxed and non-threatening interview approach, in the investigation of a non-contentious subject matter but should a participant becomes anxious, or upset, I will suggest we take some time out, adjourn or even cease the interview preferring extreme caution to risking causing harm. It is worth noting that my previous, local government employment included a range of human resource roles and I have had experience in holding interviews on bullying and harassment, misconduct and other similarly-sensitive topics.

The information sheets also contain contact details of organisations which participants may wish to contact for further help and support as a result of reflecting on their experiences during the interview.

The interviews are anticipated to last from December to September June 2015 and participants would be given the opportunity to request that their contribution is withdrawn, before the completion of the transcript coding in September 2015. Even though it is difficult to account for all possibilities and requests, I will be guided of the principle of taking all reasonable steps to avoid causing harm.

Lastly, I am aware of my responsibility to protect myself from harm. To do so, I will provide my Director of Studies with a schedule of all interviews for the day, including start times, anticipated end times and location. I will ensure I contact him after completing each interview to confirm safe ending.

	<p>(a) Debriefing:</p> <p>Each participant will be provided with a detailed information sheet before each interview, outlining what the process involves, confidentiality and right to withdraw.</p>										
	<p>(a) Confidentiality:</p> <p>The information sheet contains the following section:</p> <p><b>Is it confidential?</b></p> <p>You are assured that everything you say will be treated with strict confidentiality. All audio files made during the study will be destroyed upon its completion. A paper record [transcript] will be kept, however, all information which could identify you, or others you may mention will be excluded, and the transcript redacted to ensure anonymity. All records will also be analysed and stored in compliance with Plymouth University's Ethics Policy and Data Protection 1998 legislation.</p>										
	<p>(a) Professional Bodies Whose Ethical Policies Apply to this Research:</p> <p>This research will be undertaken in accordance with the non-harm and integrity principles of the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (FRE) 2010 Updated September 2012.</p> <p><i>The committee strongly recommends that prior to application, applicants consult an appropriate professional code of ethics regardless of whether or not they are members of that body (for example, Social Research Association . <a href="http://www.the-sra.org.uk/ethical.htm">http://www.the-sra.org.uk/ethical.htm</a> Market Research Society <a href="http://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/codeconduct.htm">http://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/codeconduct.htm</a> British Sociological Association <a href="http://www.britisoc.co.uk/equality/">http://www.britisoc.co.uk/equality/</a>). Applicants <b>MAY</b> choose to write "not applicable" in the "Relevant Professional Bodies" section of the Ethical Application Form. However, it is very rare that there would be no professional/academic code of ethics relevant to a given research project. If based on the information written in other sections of the form, FREC considers a particular professional code to be of relevance, then the Committee may make its consultation and adherence a condition of acceptance.</i></p>										
11.	<p><b>Declaration*:</b></p> <p>To the best of our knowledge and belief, this research conforms to the ethical principles laid down by Plymouth University and by the professional body specified in 6 (g).</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Name</th> <th>E-mail (s)</th> <th>Date</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Principal Investigator:</td> <td>Constantine Manolchev</td> <td><a href="mailto:constantine.manolchev@plymouth.ac.uk">constantine.manolchev@plymouth.ac.uk</a></td> <td>02/10/2014</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Name	E-mail (s)	Date	Principal Investigator:	Constantine Manolchev	<a href="mailto:constantine.manolchev@plymouth.ac.uk">constantine.manolchev@plymouth.ac.uk</a>	02/10/2014
	Name	E-mail (s)	Date								
Principal Investigator:	Constantine Manolchev	<a href="mailto:constantine.manolchev@plymouth.ac.uk">constantine.manolchev@plymouth.ac.uk</a>	02/10/2014								



	Other Staff Investigators:			
	Director of Studies (only where Principal Investigator is a postgraduate student):	Professor Duncan Lewis	<a href="mailto:duncan.lewis@plymouth.ac.uk">duncan.lewis@plymouth.ac.uk</a>	

\*You will be notified by the Research Ethical Approval Committee once your application is approved.  
**This process normally takes around 3-4 weeks.**

Please Answer Either YES or NO to ALL Questions Below.

If you answer YES, please provide further details.

**Do You Plan To Do:**

- Research involving vulnerable groups – for example, children and young people, those with a learning disability or cognitive impairment, or individuals in a dependent or unequal relationship

**Answer: No**

- Research involving sensitive topics – for example participants' sexual behaviour, their illegal or political behaviour, their experience of violence, their abuse or exploitation, their mental health, or their gender or ethnic status

**Answer: Yes, however, this entails a single gender status question, based on the categories used in the nationally-representative Work and Employment Relations Survey (WERS) 2011.**

- Research involving groups where permission of a gatekeeper is normally required for initial access to members – for example, ethnic or cultural groups, native peoples or indigenous communities

**Answer: No. The research will seek access to Bulgarian migrants, yet my own Bulgarian identity enables me to join and participate in an open Facebook group set-up with the purpose of connecting Bulgarian migrants with their compatriots. This group offers open access to Bulgarians and non-Bulgarians alike and intend to post the information sheet of my research, seeking participants. This will enable both informed consent and voluntary participation.**

- Research involving deception or which is conducted without participants' full and informed consent at the time the study is carried out

**Answer: No.**

- Research involving access to records of personal or confidential information, including genetic or other biological information, concerning identifiable individuals

**Answer: No.**

- Research which would induce psychological stress, anxiety or humiliation or cause more than minimal pain

**Answer: No.**

- Research involving intrusive interventions – for example, the administration of drugs or other substances, vigorous physical exercise, or techniques such as hypnotherapy.

Participants would not encounter such interventions, which may cause them to reveal information which causes concern, in the course of their everyday life.

**Answer: No.**